Speed

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It's been said that little things can change the world, and they can. But then, so can big things. This is the story of the big things that happen when Ron Weasley meets his mother's cousin, the Accountant they don't talk about. Ron learned that there is more to life than magic. Sometimes a skill gained by accident is all you really need to change the world.

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Speed

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Chapter 1

A/N: I do not own Harry Potter. Nor any of the DC Comics Characters mentioned herein. But you knew that.

A/N2: This is an extremely AU fic. Unusually for a Harry Potter fic, Harry isn't the central character. The 'hero' of this tale is on Ron Weasley. Anyone who reads my stuff knows that I've done some horrible things to Ron over the years, mostly because he is perfectly situated in the story to be 'the bad guy' or the 'comedy relief'. The funny thing is, I like Ron from the books. He was, in my opinion the most realistically portrayed character in the stories. He wasn't the hero, but he was willing to defend the hero, he wasn't a genius, but he was smart enough to recognize when a situation was going south… and stay in the line of fire anyway. Ron of canon was jealous, a goof, judgmental, more than a little reactionary, prejudiced and a good guy. In other words, he was a teenaged boy.

This story is for Ron, for all the crap we Fic Mongers put you through buddy.

Speed

Blue Valley

My name is Ron Weasley.

What? Yeah, I've got a middle name, but I've always hated it.

It doesn't matter what it is.

No, it doesn't.

All right, fine. It's Billius.

Yes, Billius.

I know, I know, Billius. What were Mum and Dad thinking?

My unfortunate middle name aside, I was standing alongside my two best friends, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. We were waiting to go to war. When facing something like that you find out things about yourself. Me, I found out that Harry was someone I would die for, and Hermione… Hermione I wanted to live for.

The actual war started before any of us were born, and none of us were really clear on precisely why it had fallen to us to fight it, but there we were, waiting for it to start.

The worst part of was all the waiting. It seemed like I was always waiting. Time drags constantly with my mind racing toward its next thought.

On and on.

Toward forever.

Harry had just finished his briefing to the rest of the Defense Association; Voldemort was supposed to be there in half an hour. An eternity.

The DA was deployed throughout the grounds of the castle, it didn't look like the staff was going to be much help, which was typical, but at least this time they were all busy guarding the younger kids.

Hermione was at Harry's side, as usual. Of course, so was I. Voldemort was coming.

Harry said we were ready. I believed him, because he had me on his side.

Don't let this pretty face fool you. I'm very effective in battle. I cheat.

I was ten.

Mum's cousin, the accountant we never spoke of, had contacted her and wanted to reconnect with the family. Mum began exchanging letters with him and somehow Ginny and I ended up going to visit 'Uncle' Ruddie and 'Aunt' Mary at their home in Nebraska.

Nebraska is in the colonies somewhere… Canada I think. I never really paid that much attention, really. The closest town was called 'Blue Valley' even though the valley it was in wasn't particularly blue. My fifteen year old 'cousin' Wally was responsible for showing me around… when he was available. He usually was, but sometimes… It was odd. One second Wally would be with me, and the next he would be gone.

Don't get me wrong, Wally was a good bloke, even if he didn't know his name was an insult. He got his hair from the Prewett side of the family, so he was a proper redhead. He had some seriously cool gear and was generous in sharing it with me. Gin was pretty much out of luck, as Wally did not have a sister and she was not interested in his things so she hung out with Aunt Mary mostly.

The first day we were there, Wally was surprised to find out that I did not know how to ride a bicycle, so he taught me. A bike isn't a broom, but as ways to travel go, it's not bad. On my first solo ride later that afternoon, I looked back smiling in my pride of having mastered the machine and Wally was gone.

That boggled my mind. One second he was there, the next he was gone. Did he apparate? There hadn't been any noise, he was just gone…

Besides, he wasn't supposed to have any magic. This was just… weird.

Our days settled into an easy pattern. We would get up to breakfast and a morning of chores. Nothing particularly different about that, Weasleys learn chores early, and for the most part what chores there were at the West home were minimal, I don't think I saw a gnome the whole time I was in Nebraska. Over lunch, we would talk. Wally would tell us about his school and we would tell him of our lessons with Mum. Aunt Mary and Wally didn't know about magic, so Gin and I had to be careful what we told them. But we weren't the only ones with secrets, there were things that Wally accidentally hinted at a few times, but he usually covered himself well.

If I hadn't grown up with Fred and George I probably would never have spotted his mistakes, but I had, so I did. That said, I figured I

had my secrets, so Wally could have his.

We generally spent afternoons just goofing off. I learned that a fifteen year old doesn't 'play' he goofs off. This is important, because of the possibility that he might be seen. It turns that being seen has a potential immediate effect on one's perceived coolness. Apparently, to a fifteen year old, being thought of as 'cool' by his friends was one of the most important things in the world.

After dinner, we were afforded more time to goof off, and then back to the house for some time with a marvelous machine called a television.

In short, life in Blue Valley was great. Wally introduced me around to his friends, portraying me as a burden inflicted upon him by parental whim. I understood, I used much the same attitude when Ginny accompanied me back home.

We had been with the West family for almost three weeks when my life changed. Wally had decided that day to show me the tree house he had built when he was my age. He made the five years that separated us sound like a lifetime, which I suppose it was.

The tree house was actually little more than a platform in the branches of an old walnut tree, but I loved it. Aunt Mary had provided a picnic lunch and Wally brought along his collection of comic books (Muggles have comics… Who knew?) and together we spent the day day-dreaming, reading comics and just having a good time.

Then I looked up from the Adventures of Tin Tin to find that Wally was gone. Utterly gone.

I had spoken with him only seconds before, and there was no way to make the descent to the ground silently, and even if he had, this tree stood alone in a field, I could see a quarter mile in every direction and Wally was nowhere to be seen.

What the heck was going on? Had the family's magic reemerged in my distant cousin? That seemed unlikely. My brother Bill could apparate, and despite being the coolest guy on the planet (just ask

him) he couldn't apparate silently. How was Wally doing this?

I decided then and there that I had had enough of this, and I was going to get to the bottom of Wally's disappearances. So I settled back down to wait.

I'd been waiting an hour and a half when the sky started to darken. During our visit to Nebraska Ginny and I had been treated to some of the most impressive storms I'd ever heard of, so I recognized what was coming. I gathered everything together and set out for Wally's house. There was no sense in getting drenched after all, I could wait for Wally in his room.

As soon as I got out from under the tree's canopy, the sky opened up and I was soaked to the bone. Wonderful. I thought for a moment about getting back under the tree, but a crack of thunder convinced me that doing so would be an exceedingly bad idea. The amount of water coming down convinced me that lying in a ditch was probably not the best idea either, so I dropped the picnic things and started to run toward a somewhat higher small furrow that hopefully would allow me to ride out the storm without drowning. I was perhaps two paces away from my hoped for place of safety when the entire universe lit up all around me and my soul was on fire.

I woke to two sensations, motion and an uncontrollable shaking. I opened my eyes to see a world I never even imagined. Everything was seemingly frozen in place and I was somehow moving while face down. It took a short time before I had fully taken in my situation. Someone was carrying me over their shoulder. Someone wearing some sort of red leggings and a yellow shirt. I was facing down and I could see my benefactor's foot prints as we sped along.

That was when I realized that those footprints were in what appeared to be water. Water that was somewhat… solid… but not ice. That struck me as being very odd.

My senses seemed to be coming back to me one at a time. The runner managed to kick up some of the strangely solid water and some of it hit me in the face. On my face, it was very liquid, and very

cool, but most definitely not frozen, and it tasted like… well, water.

I was being carried by someone running on a jellied lake or something? How did that make the slightest bit of sense?

I still couldn't move, but my hearing was coming back. I was amazed by the silence. There was a soft swish of the runner's steps on the odd surface, and now that I concentrated on it, the runner was babbling.

"Oh god, I'm sorry Ron, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do this to you, don't worry, Barry can fix it. Barry can fix it, I promise. Oh god!"

Wally? What was he talking about? He hadn't done anything. I had been struck by lightning. That must be why I had the shakes so bad. Once when Charlie was playing with one of the twin's pranked books a bolt of blue fire erupted from the book and Charlie was shaking for two hours.

Then, of course, once he had regained his muscle control, Charlie beat the stupidity out of Fred and George, but there you go. Pranking family has its cost, as the twins well knew.

In a blink, we weren't over the oddly solid water anymore, but on a paved road, we were passing all these Muggle cars on the road weaving in and out of them. The oddness continued, why were all these cars parked in the road? Where was everyone, and why was it so quiet?

We were suddenly in a building… a building full of statues. Wally stopped suddenly, and began babbling. "Barry! I screwed up; I tried to save him but he's like this and…"

"Not here," another voice said. "My office, I'll be there as soon as I can."

We quickly made our way past the statues to an office. This was nothing like my Dad's office at the ministry; it was large and uncluttered, with only a single desk and several chairs. Wally lowered me onto one of the chairs, and seemed to be overjoyed to

find my eyes open.

"Ron?" he pulled me into a hug. "You're a wake, thank god, I wasn't sure if I had killed you or something…"

I tried to talk, but the shaking my body was doing made making any sound seemingly impossible. Somehow, through the lack of control of my own body, I could see the concern in my cousin's eyes. It was only then I noticed that he was wearing some kind of mask. His hair was exposed, but rather than his normal Prewett red, it was a sort of mousy brown. The mask was yellow and wrapped around his head, exposing his eyes and his face from his nose to chin. The mask flowed seamlessly into his yellow shirt. The shirt had a red lightning bolt centered on his chest and there were red wing things over each ear.

In short, he looked like some kind of… well, like a wally.

I sat there trying to understand what was happening to me when a tall blonde man I did not recognize entered the room. "What happened?"

"I don't know. I got a Titan's call and when I got back, I found Ron… Ron is my cousin, he was about to be hit by lightning. I grabbed hold of his shoulder and got him vibrating just as the lightning struck and then he was like this," Wally paused panting a little. Titan's call? Got me vibrating? What did that even mean?"

The tall blond man knelt down to look me in the eye. "Ron, my name is Barry Allen; I'm Wally's uncle on his mother's side. I think something very special has happened to you, I'm going to try and help you, alright?"

I managed to nod, wondering just what might be so 'special' about shaking as if I had freezing charms on my y-fronts.

Barry placed his right hand on my chest, and then reached behind me to put his left on my back. After a few moments he whistled.

"What is it?" Wally asked bouncing from foot to foot.

"Wally, your cousin here has somehow fully synced into the Speed

Force, and he's done it quite a bit faster than either you or I did. His problem is that he can't slow down."

'Synced into the Speed Force'? What did that even mean?

"But that doesn't make any sense, both of us were exposed to a chemical bath before being hit by lightning to sync to the Force, how did…"

"I don't know," Barry shrugged. "Maybe it was being in physical contact with you that jump started his acceleration, negating the need for the chemicals." The Barry turned back to me. "Ron, we've got to slow you down,"

Slow me down? That statement puzzled me more than anything that had happened so far that day. I was sitting in a chair. How much slower did I need to be? Still, whatever was wrong with me, Wally was certain that this Barry bloke could fix it, so I just nodded.

The big man placed the palm of his right hand once again against my breastbone and did… something.

A flash of light burst from my chest, brighter than any I had ever managed with Bill's wand that time I swiped it, and suddenly I was not shaking any more.

"Well, that worked," Barry said, a look of confusion on his face. "Not sure why it worked, but it worked." He knelt down in front of me so that we were face to face. "So tell me Ron, what do you know about the Flash?"

"Who?" I asked intelligently. "Is that a person or a thing?" Honestly, the whole idea of Muggle Super Heroes hadn't come up during my visit to Blue Valley, and I'd never heard of this Flash person.

Barry looked over toward Wally, who shrugged.

"Ron's my cousin from England," he explained. "He doesn't seem to know much about a whole lot of things."

"You've honestly never heard of the Flash?" Barry asked me again, clearly perplexed.

"Sorry, no," I replied.

"I was with the Justice League stopping an alien invasion of London just three months ago," the man said, searching my face for any recognition.

My blank expression was all the answer he needed.

"The Justice League? Batman? Wonder Woman? Green Arrow?" He asked while I wondered what any of those words meant together. What was a 'Bat man' I wondered. What was he wondering about a woman? And why would an arrow be green?

"Surely you've heard of Superman?"

Again, I shook my head, wondering if I was going to get into trouble for my lack of Muggle knowledge.

Wally exchanged a glance with his uncle, as if my not knowing of this 'Super Man' was among the oddest things either of them had ever heard.

"All right Ron," Barry said standing up and placing his hand on my shoulder. "None of that really matters. What does matter is that you have been given an exceptional gift." The man smiled at me and I felt somehow special.

"Come on, Ron," Wally said, pulling me to my feet. "Let's go for a run."

"That's the plan," Barry laughed. "It will be easier to show you than to try to explain."

I'll admit, I thought they were crazy, talking about going for a run. Barry produced this red and yellow outfit for me to wear 'to protect my clothes' he said. I struggled into the suit, and was surprised to find that it had a hood that covered my face above the nose… a mask? Unlike Wally's the hood/mask thing covered my hair as well. I looked up to find that Barry was in an identical outfit.

Weird.

We made our way out of the building full of statues, out into the street full of parked cars… cars that had statues sitting behind the wheels.

Did I say that this was weird? Up to that point, I had no idea that I had such a talent for understatement.

Then we started to run. Back home we Weasleys ran everywhere if we weren't flying, but it was at that moment I discovered that I had never really run before. Time and motion blurred into one. Distance had no meaning. That was when I finally understood. Those weren't statues and the cars weren't parked.

They had all been moving too slowly for me to notice. No. That was wrong. The rest of the world wasn't slow, I was fast. Barry, Wally, and I were fast. It was amazing, it was wonderful, and it was what I was born to do.

I ran.

I have no idea how long we ran that first time we were out together, just the three of us surrendering to the speed. It is hard to explain to anyone who doesn't hear the Speed Force singing to them with every step. To be one with the speed is a sort of heaven.

From within this heaven, Barry and Wally showed me so much. Within seconds of our run, a building was suddenly in front of me. I hadn't learned to stop or turn yet, so I was sure I was about to run face first into the brick wall. Just before I hit that wall, Barry laid his hand on my shoulder and showed me what to do. I passed through that brick wall, and every other obstacle that came into our path for the rest of that first run as if the obstacles were not there.

It was only later Barry explained what he had shown me. Every solid thing, it seems, is made of tiny things called atoms, and those atoms are mostly empty space. The Speed Force gives you the ability to control each and every atom of your body to the extent that you can

consciously vibrate your atoms so that they miss the solid parts of other atoms allowing you to pass right through solid objects.

Now, I know that does not make a bit of sense, but I promise you, it works.

We ran for what seemed to be hours without tiring, without even starting to breathe hard. It was glorious. We ran on roads, we ran across fields, and through cities and towns and over water. We just ran.

The three of us ended up on the road outside of Wally's home, where Barry taught me how to stop. The three of us stood still on the road, and I marveled at how I could see the individual raindrops sparkle as they hit the soft glow of the auras that surrounded us, sliding off leaving us all completely dry.

"What do you think?" Barry asked.

"This is amazing," I answered before I realized how long we had been gone. "Aunt Mary is going to be worried. How do we explain what happened?"

Wally laughed. "Ron," he said, his eyes sparkling behind his mask, "less than two minutes has passed since the lightning bolt hit you."

I guess my eyes bugged out a bit at that news. Prior to this point, I understood we were fast, but it hadn't really sunk in just how fast we were. The three of us gathered in the West family barn and Barry tried to explain what had happened to me.

For me, the hardest concept was the idea that I should take on a 'secret Identity' Barry said that if I went the hero route, my friends and family would be at risk if the world knew who I was and what I could do. And even if I didn't become a hero, there were people who would want to 'study' me to see if they could figure out how I could possibly be so fast.

As if there was ever any question as to what I would do.

We then launched into a long discussion as to what my 'Hero' name should be. Barry was The Flash, and Wally was Kid Flash. Wally

suggested that I become 'Little Kid Flash', so I smacked him one. Barry on the other hand offered a long list of heroes from the past with appropriate names. I have to admit that 'Ronnie Quick' really tempted me, but I knew what I wanted.

I knew the perfect name. Despite considering 'Cannonball' as a tribute to the my favorite Quidditch team, I knew I wanted the name that would honor both my magic and my speed.

I was going to be 'The Whiz'!

Wally would never explain why that made him laugh so hard.

Chapter 2

A/N: I do not own Harry Potter. Nor any of the DC Comics Characters mentioned herein. But you knew that.

A/N2: This continues to be an extremely AU fic. Ron Weasley's first year at Hogwarts has all the adventure a budding hero could want, but Ron is more than a little confused by how, even here, he has somehow remained the sidekick.

Speed

First Year

Twenty five minutes to go.

Did everything have to take forever?

Harry moved off to speak with Sue Bones from Hufflepuff. The 'puffs were running some sort of infiltration effort that Harry had high hopes for. Sue and her Hufflepuff cadre were good at what they did. Very good. Everyone underestimated the Hufflepuffs, a mistake Sue exploited at every opportunity.

"Ron," Hermione said as a movement in the Forbidden forest caught my attention. "I'm worried about Har…"

I'm gone before she can complete the second syllable of our friend's name, leaving my robes in midair and pulling my cowl over my face. I'm in the forest, and I find what made the motion that caught my eye.

Giants. Two of them. A normal wizard facing off against a pair of giants would be dead.

But then, I'm not a normal wizard, am I? Speed is what Barry always called a 'Force Multiplier'. It allows you to do things that a 'normal' person cannot. Being able to operate in a time-frame that your opponents cannot even perceive is a definite advantage. I kick it into

high gear and after pushing myself as fast as I can comfortably go in such an enclosed area, I use Wally's new trick.

I come to a sudden halt with a massive oak between the giants, and me. I place my hands on the trunk. With a thought, I pass my stored kinetic energy, my inertia into the tree.

The oak explodes, sending lethal speed force enhanced fragments into the pair of giants, shredding their bodies.

They're dead, they just haven't noticed yet. Barry always cautioned against killing, but recognized that sometimes it was necessary. This was a war after all, a war the giants had joined knowing they would be killing children.

I returned to Hermione, her attention focused on my afterimage remaining on her retina. I peeled my mask back, vibrated my way back into my robes still hanging in midair, slowed my perceptions, and waited.

"ry" she said completing her sentence as I imagined I could hear the two giants fall in the forest. "I need you to help me keep an eye on him. You know how he is; he'll see everyone who gets hurt as being all his fault."

I nodded. Barry had shown me the way. He had set the example of what a Hero does, how he lives and if necessary, how he dies. Nothing was going to harm my friends today. Not as long as I had breath enough to run.

I was eleven.

I had spent the last year learning about speed.

Ginny and I had returned to the Burrow a week after the thunderstorm that changed my life, but the distance between our homes hardly inconvenienced my training and adventures with Wally and Barry. If I pushed myself, the time it took me to cover the distance between the Burrow and Blue Valley was just under twenty three seconds. Both Wally and Barry could do it in less.

Mum, of course, noticed the change in me almost immediately. It was when we sat down to the first meal after Ginny and I returned. Much to Mum's displeasure, I had never been much of an eater. I would pick at what was on my plate, and then push what remained around with my fork until allowed to leave the table.

After the trip, I ate like a starving man. Barry blamed this change on how my metabolism linked into the Speed Force, all I know is that I'm always hungry, and Mum loved that. There was nothing that woman enjoyed more than seeing her children eat. So, I made her happy. The problem was remembering to eat slowly.

On our fifth run together, Barry presented me with my own uniforms. They were like his, but a lovely Chudley orange instead of Red. He also presented me with a ring to store a uniform in. The ring was a bit large on my hand, but it did some sort of Muggle Magic that shrunk and enlarged the uniform depending on if the uniform was going in or coming out. It was really cool to watch, but I was pretty sure that I could improve on it once I learned the necessary magic. I managed to talk Bill into hiding the ring behind a heavy Notice Me Not charm. I think I left him with the impression that the ring was associated with some silly kids club.

Even the coolest guy in the world (just ask him) will fall for a little kid being a little kid. I ran that scam on Bill far more often than I like to admit, and for far longer than I should have. No matter how old I got, he always saw me as his baby brother.

My adventures with Barry involved solving a few crimes, which was seriously cool. Barry was the smartest guy I ever met, and he taught me a lot. He also showed me how to use his 'cosmic treadmill', which allowed us to run through time. The Treadmill was really frustrating to me, because I couldn't use it by myself. I just didn't have enough speed. To activate it Barry or Wally had to be on it with me. Barry just laughed at my depression over that and told me not to worry, as I grew and got stronger, I would be faster.

My adventures with Wally were different. Wally was as much a hero as Barry, but where Barry was a member of a group called the Justice League, a group that didn't take Wally or me seriously, Wally was a member of a group that didn't take ME seriously.

The Teen Titans. They were a varied group. Wally, of course, was a member, but there was also an older kid named Roy, who went by the name 'Speedy' for some reason and shot trick arrows with a bow. He was amazing to watch, accurate with his bow, and fast… Not as fast as Wally or me of course, but for a normal lad, he almost blurred when he moved.

Garth was a dark haired bloke who claimed to come from Atlantis and who could breathe water and talk to fish. I have to admit I wondered long and hard how that power-set was useful in any way at all.

Donna was different. Outwardly she was a happy older girl, well, older than me anyway, but somehow she always seemed kind of sad. I'm not sure why. They called her Wondergirl, and she was insanely strong, fast and she could fly… sort of.

Then there was Dick. They called him 'Robin'. Dick was the kind of bloke who looked at you and you just knew that he was figuring out the best way to do you damage. Not in a bad way, really, I mean, I don't think he did it consciously, but he most specifically did it with everyone, and I don't think the others noticed. When the group got together, they goofed around with each other, listened to music, and ate a wonderful food called 'Pizza' but you could tell that Dick was never really relaxing in any meaningful way.

Robin was the Team leader when they went out to fight their battles, which struck me as odd at first because he really seemed to be the least talented of them all. Then I went along for a fight.

Robin scared me more than the villains did. The least powerful of the group, he may have been, but he more than made up for his perceived lack of power in sheer bloody mindedness. Later I asked Wally about Dick.

Wally said that Dick's partner was a real head case. I wasn't sure what that meant, but I nodded as if I did. Wally went on to tell me that of all the Heroes operating in the world today, the only hero the bulk of the villains really feared was the Batman… and more than a few of those were also frightened by Robin.

Add me to that list.

I play a mean game of chess. I lose occasionally, but never more than two games before I can figure out the way my opponent thinks and use that to beat him. I made the mistake of challenging Dick to a game.

He crushed me, five games in a row. I never had a clue what he was thinking the whole time. That was very weird. I didn't like it, I never challenged him again.

The Titans, well, they treated me like a crup that has learned not to make messes in the house. Sometimes that really annoyed me, because I was sure that if I hit my top speed, I could clean all their clocks… Other than Wally of course…

And Robin. There was no way I was ever going to go up against Robin.

Anyway, life was good.

Then it was September 1st.

In all honesty, with the excitement of my runs with Wally and Barry, I'd forgotten about Hogwarts. Still, even speedsters have to go to school. Wally was starting his second year at something he called 'high school' soon and Barry told me that he still occasionally took classes, so I decided that going to school wasn't going to bother me all that much.

Besides, it wasn't like I had a choice.

That is how I came to be on the platform watching a skinny kid with glasses struggling to lift his trunk onto the train. George and Fred gave him a hand before I could get away from Mum and Ginny.

"Ron," Mum whispered as she licked her thumb and rubbed at a smudge over my left eyebrow, "that poor boy had no idea how to find the Platform. I think he might be Muggleborn. Keep an eye on him would you? There are some who would go out of their way to

make him feel unwelcome."

"Okay Mum," I said, accepting her kiss on my cheek before I started for the train.

It was going to be a long ride… Maybe I could duck out and see what Wally was up to…

Making my way down the aisle, I spotted the skinny kid sitting alone in a compartment. I reflected on how Mum was right, he did look lost. If any of the Pureblood fanatics got hold of him, they would eat him alive.

For a moment I considered offering an excuse for intruding on his privacy, something like "Everywhere else if full", but that would be pretty stupid, considering the train hadn't even started moving yet, so I just slid the door open.

"Want some company?" I asked.

He nodded shyly.

"Thanks," I said shoving my battered trunk into the overhead storage. I flopped into the seat across from him. "I'm Ron Weasley," I said.

"Harry Potter," he said in response.

I blinked. Twice. Harry Potter? I was in a compartment with Harry Potter?

I know, I know, I'm sounding like a fanboy, but… Harry Potter! I'd heard stories about him my whole life. I mean, it wasn't like I was Ginny with her nightly bedtime stories featuring the Boy Who Lived, but I learned to read with the Adventures of Harry Potter series.

But looking at him then, I got the feeling that he hadn't been awarded special consideration allowing him to have a wand at 5. That he had never actually captured a Pirates' frigate with his genius troll confidante and plucky squib sidekick. This skinny kid likely

never led his team of magical adventurers in exploring the caverns of the giant mountain gnomes, and probably never ended up fighting his way out of the castle of the evil Muggle Queen.

I think that was the moment that I realized that those stories were just that, stories.

Then I did something stupid. I knew it was stupid as I did it, but I did it anyway. It was as if I couldn't help myself.

"Do you really have…" I pointed to his forehead. "You know…"

Harry lifted his fringe to show a scar shaped like a lightning bolt. I stared and still couldn't believe what was coming out of my mouth, "So that's where You-Know-Who…?"

"That's what I'm told." Harry said with a sigh. "I don't remember it."

"Wow," I breathed realizing what I was doing and getting control of myself. "That sucks," I said echoing a term I had heard Wally use more than once.

"So, are all your family wizards?" Harry asked, seeming to find me as interesting as I found him. It was a while before I discovered that this was an aspect of Harry. He truly liked people and was almost always interested in what they had to say.

The two of us bonded on that train ride in a journey punctuated with visits from Draco Malfoy, an odd Muggleborn girl named Hermione Granger who was looking for a toad, and of course the famous Hogwarts Express Sweets trolley. I shared my Mum's roast beef sandwiches and Harry about bought out the trolley, and kept shoving more toward me until I gave in.

A man can only ignore chocolate for so long.

Malfoy was looking for Harry, hoping to form some sort of alliance it seemed. In doing so, the blond wally insulted me and my family. Harry told Malfoy to piss off over that, which lead the ponce to start making threats.

Malfoy left without actually doing anything, of course. I was quite

impressed with Harry's ability to ignore an obvious bully like Malfoy. Maybe those stories had some truth in them after all.

Not too long after Malfoy left we were treated to an appearance of a bossy little force of nature came into our lives looking for Trevor the toad. We didn't know what she was going to come to mean to us at the time, of course, but we knew she was there. After looking for the toad, looking askance at the goofy joke 'spell' I tried to use to tease her a bit, and announcing that she had already read the years course books, she left us to continue her mission.

Harry and I just exchanged looks after she had left, and we started to laugh.

I'd already decided that I was going to do Fred damage. 'Wrestle a troll' he had said. Yeah right. All I had to do was put on a talking hat.

Waiting for the Sorting was hell. All waiting was hell actually. Barry had been worried about that at first until he decided that it wasn't hurting me. He was of the opinion that my mind was operating at something like three times normal speed. It didn't make me any smarter, but it did make waiting for the world to catch up to be an unending hell.

What it really meant is that I had to be constantly on guard against my own speed.

I watched as the others were all sorted. A bunch of kids I didn't know… Oh Sue Bones, a girl who I had met at a Ministry function, she went to Hufflepuff, but I didn't really know her. The bossy girl went to Gryffindor, surprising me a little; I'd figured her for a Ravenclaw. Malfoy went to Slytherin, of course. Where else would a vile little daddy's boy go?

Harry was sorted into Gryffindor and was staring at me expectantly as Professor McGonagall called my name.

"Ronald Weasley."

I approached the stool where the Hat was waiting for me. It suddenly

occurred to me that I might be putting my 'secret identity' at risk. As I set the hat down over my head, I tried to think of ways to protect my secrets.

-Weasley?

What if the talking hat started spilling all of my secrets? My blood went cold. Wally's secrets? Barry's?

-Weasley?

This was horrible! I couldn't risk my identity! Much less anyone else's. I had to get out of there.

-Weasley!

I sat up suddenly. A voice in my head? Oh yeah the Hat.

-Godrick's beard boy, slow down! Your thoughts are going to set my felt afire!

I realized what I had been doing… I had kicked my perceptions up a notch or two without noticing. I took a deep breath and pushed myself back down into real time. I immediately felt the drag of dealing with the world again.

Sorry hat, I thought.

-I've been sorting children for a thousand years boy, the hat sputtered in my head. **-I've never come up against a mind like yours.**

Sorry again, I thought wondering if the hat did anything other than complain.

-I do quite a bit more than complain, Weasley, the hat huffed in my mind. **-And be at ease, your secrets are safe with me.**

Oh, I responded thinking about the silliness of a mind reading hat, and then wondering what the hat thought about that thought. So, what do you say hat? Gryffindor?

-Where else would I send a Weasley, boy? The hat laughed, - **with your goals and what you've done since your magic saved your life…**

My magic saved my life?

-Of course it did. You were struck by lightning as your cousin touched you. Magical children frequently have episodes of accidental magic in life threatening situations. Your magic recognized that what your cousin was doing was protecting him from the lightning, so it found a way to duplicate his abilities in you, so as to keep you alive.

Well, that made sense.

-You've been given a gift Weasley, make sure you use it. It will serve you well in…

"Gryffindor!"

After the sorting was finished, the Headmaster set the theme for the year by announcing that everyone should avoid the 3rd floor, unless we wanted to die.

Of course I'm serious. He stood there flat footed in the Great Hall and announced he had something so dangerous that being around it could kill you in the school.

What do you think? Of course some of the students started looking for it. My older Twin Brothers especially. They never could resist that kind of challenge.

No, they never found it. Despite looking the entire year, they never even got close.

Oh, no, it was real.

I found it. Well, Harry, Hermione, Neville Longbottom and I did. We were out after curfew and were hiding from the Caretaker when we stumbled on it. But that happened later.

It didn't take long for us to settle into a routine. We had class, we had homework, and we had time off. There was usually too much of the first two and never enough of the third.

There were four other lads in my dorm room, Harry, of course, Neville Longbottom, Dean Thomas, and Seamus Finnegan. We all got on. We traded our class notes and played games. Seamus and Dean bonded as did Harry and I. Neville was such a shy lad, he tended to spend most of his time on his own, though he joined in whenever all of us were together. There were also three girls in our year in Gryffindor, not that any of us were all that interested at the time. Parvati Patil, Lavender Brown, a pair of girlie girls, and Hermione Granger, the bushy haired swot rounded out our cohort.

Classes were classes. A bit more intense than those I had with my mum, but still classes.

Professor McGonagall, our head of house was strict and demanding in class, but Merlin! Did she ever know her stuff. She taught Transfiguration and she quickly showed that she could change pretty much anything into anything else. In our first class, before she even took role, she showed that she could change herself from a cat to a human. That was so cool. Then she changed her desk into a pig and then back again.

Charms was taught by the head of Ravenclaw house, Professor Flitwick. He was the least demanding of all the staff, there were rumors that he had some goblin in his family, which might have accounted for his small size. His classes were fun and full of new things all the time… Of course it was in his class I set in motion events that almost got someone killed. More on that later.

The Head of Hufflepuff house taught Herbology. Professor Sprout, yes, that was her name, loved her subject as all the other Professors. Her classes were interesting enough, and a chance to actually do something as opposed to all the theory we got in Transfiguration and Charms. Herbology might have been my favorite class if so many of the plants involved were actively trying to kill us.

Herbology. That's the study of magical plants. Most magical plants have defenses that Muggles have never… Muggles. People without

magic.

Well, yeah, sort of. At a Teen Titans meeting, Dick told us stories about fighting Poison Ivy and her plants. Let me assure you, compared to most magical plants, her plants were cute little annoyances, and compared to Professor Sprout, Poison Ivy was an amateur weekend gardener.

Then there was Potions. The Potions Professor was the most prejudiced, unfair, arse who ever taught any subject, anywhere.

You have no idea.

No, you don't. Look, did this 'jerk' teacher of yours ever ignore physical attacks on students? Did he ever look at a young girl who was being disfigured and announce that he saw no difference? Did he allow favored students to sabotage the class projects of the rest of the class?

I ran, a whole lot, to burn off the anger I had for that man. Snape was protected by the Headmaster, so you'll be hearing about him throughout my story.

The Headmaster? Albus Dumbledore. I know you've never heard of him, but he's a legend in the Magical world where I come from. A war hero, the most powerful wizard in the world according to pretty much everyone, the only man Voldemort feared. My family all but worshiped him.

I think the real problem is that he started to believe his own legend.

Harry and I bonded over homework and the oppression of the teachers and staff. I taught him to play wizarding chess and he taught me things about the Muggle world. It was funny, as much time as I had spent with Wally and Barry, there was so much I had no clue about.

For some reason, Malfoy still felt he needed to be a twat. Just because he could, he started some trouble with Neville Longbottom, and Harry stood up and defended our friend.

Malfoy challenged Harry to a Wizards Duel. Harry had no clue what the Slytherin was talking about, so of course, I let my mouth outrunning my brain, and I accepted in his place, and nominated myself as his second.

Yeah, I'm an idiot.

Long story short, Harry, Neville, Hermione and I ended up in the school's trophy room at midnight. Hermione had joined in, mostly I think, out of a morbid curiosity as to what a Wizard's Duel was like. She had insisted on coming along, threatening to inform my older brother Percy, a prefect, if we rejected her.

As for Malfoy, the bloody wanker never showed up. We tried to get back to our Common Room, but ended up running from the caretaker to avoid being caught out of bounds and getting detention. The four of us ended up down a corridor in an unused part of the castle. We found a locked door, but Filch was right behind us.

I was about to use my speed to vibrate the door open when Hermione pulled her wand and cast an unlocking charm. Typical. That sort of spell was on the 3rd year syllabus and she just *did it* as a firstie. Once the door was open, we piled through it and closed the door behind us where it locked again as the charm wore off.

We could hear Filch outside the door, talking to his cat. The four of us held our breaths as he tried the door, and didn't start breathing again until we could hear him leaving.

That was when Neville noticed what else was in the room with us.

Have you ever turned around and discovered that you had locked yourself in a room with a gigantic three-headed dog?

I don't recommend it.

Two of the three heads started growling menacingly, while the third lunged forward to snap, his huge maw closing inches from Neville's face.

This had the four of us running from the room screaming. I'm not sure, but I think I loaned them some of my speed, but I'm not sure.

Yeah, I can lend my speed. It's sort of like the inertia transfer thing, I didn't know how to do it then, but I think I may have done it accidently. We were back the Common Room before we knew it, managing to avoid being seen by any of the prefects or staff who roamed the halls at night.

Once we were safely back in the Common Room, Hermione read us the riot act, pointing out that we could have been killed.

Of course, being Hermione, she couldn't leave it at that, so she finished up with 'Or worse, expelled.'

That girl had some odd priorities.

Why am I telling you about this girl? Because she's important to the story.

Yeah, I liked her, I mean, not at this point in my story, but, later, yeah.

Back then, she and I were more or less at war. She was the best student in our year, and I was the laziest. She made it her mission in life to make me realize my potential, and I made it mine to annoy her.

The whole thing came to a head on Halloween of our first year. In charms, we were covering Levitation charms on feathers.

Because it's easier to levitate something light than something heavy, I mean think about it.

No, I don't know why anyone would make a spell to levitate a feather. It's a learning process. Walk before you run, right?

Anyway I was failing spectacularly, while Hermione's feather was happily floating around the room. Miss Bossy Boots decided that my problem lay in my pronunciation of *Leviosa* .

Yeah, she was right, but that wasn't the point. At least not really.

I put up with it all through class, and when exiting with Harry and the lads, I commented on how insufferable she was and suggested that she might not have any friends.

It wasn't until she pushed past me in tears, that I realized she had been behind us.

Yeah, I'm a prince.

Hermione didn't turn up for the next class and wasn't seen all afternoon. On our way down to the Great Hall for the Halloween feast, I overheard Parvati Patil telling Lavender Brown that Hermione was crying in the girls' bathroom and wanted to be left alone.

My sense of being a berk grew with her Parvati's every word. The looks that she and Lavender were shooting me didn't help.

But the moment we entered the Great Hall, where the Halloween decorations put Hermione out of my minds.

Hagrid had outdone himself. A thousand bats fluttered from the walls and ceiling while a thousand more swooped over the tables in low black clouds, making the candles in the pumpkins flicker. The feast appeared suddenly on the golden plates, as it had at the start-of-term banquet. I was reaching for a baked potato when Professor Quirrell, the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor came running into the hall, his turban askew and terror on his face. Everyone stared as he reached Professor Dumbledore's chair. The terrified man slumped against the table, and gasped, "Troll… in the dungeons… thought you ought to know."

He then sank to the floor in a dead faint.

And the Great Hall descended into chaos, until the Headmaster used his wand to fire off several noise makers.

"Prefects," he rumbled, "lead your Houses back to the dormitories

immediately!"

My brother, Percy was suddenly in his element. "Follow me! Stick together, first years! No need to fear the troll if you follow my orders! Stay close behind me, now. Make way, first years coming through! Excuse me, I'm a prefect!"

Yeah, that was Percy. Always making sure everyone knew he was a Prefect.

"How could a troll get in?" Harry asked as we climbed the stairs.

"Don't ask me, they're supposed to be really stupid," I said. "Maybe someone let it in for a

Halloween prank."

They passed different groups of people hurrying in different directions. As we jostled our way through a crowd of confused Hufflepuffs, Harry suddenly grabbed my arm.

"I've just remembered… Hermione."

"What about her?" I asked, confused by his bringing her up.

"She doesn't know about the troll."

I bit my lip. She was out moping because of me. Some hero I was turning out to be. I tried to think of a way to get Harry to head off to the Common Room on his own, allowing me to do a covert retrieval, but I could tell by his expression he was going to find her, whether I came along of not. That figured. Even at Hogwarts I was going to be the sidekick. "Oh, all right," I snapped. "But if Percy catches us, this was your idea."

Ducking down, we joined the Hufflepuffs going the other way, slipped down a deserted side corridor, and hurried off toward the girls' bathroom. We had just turned the corner when we heard quick footsteps behind us.

"Bloody hell," I hissed, pulling Harry behind a large stone griffin. "That will be Percy."

But I was wrong to be worrying about my officious older brother. Peering around the statue, we spotted Snape. He crossed the corridor and disappeared from view.

"What's he doing here?" Harry whispered. "Why isn't he down in the dungeons with the rest of the teachers?"

"Search me."

Quietly as possible, we crept along the next corridor after Snape's fading footsteps.

"He's heading for the third floor," Harry noted.

I held up my hand to stop him. "Can you smell something?"

Harry took a deep sniff and his expression told me that he had found the same foul stench as I had, a mixture of old socks and the kind of public toilet no one seems to clean.

Then we heard it. A low grunting and the shuffling footfalls of gigantic feet. I pointed down the hallway at something huge moving toward us. We shrank into the shadows as best we could and watched a huge monster emerged into a patch of moonlight.

It was a horrible sight. Twelve feet tall, its skin was a dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, armored feet. The smell coming from it was incredible. It was holding a huge wooden club, which dragged along the floor because its arms were so long.

The troll stopped next to a doorway and peered inside. It waggled its long ears, seeming to make up its mind, then slouched slowly into the room.

"The key is in the lock," Harry muttered. "We could lock it in."

"Good idea," I said, while wondering why a key would even be there, as I hadn't seen another key anywhere in Hogwarts.

We snuck up to the open door, our mouths dry, praying the troll

wasn't about to come back out.

Harry jumped forward, grabbed the key and slammed the door shut, locking it with a twist of his wrist.

"Yes!"

Flushed as we were with our victory, we paused to high five each other before we restarted our search for Hermione. Then we heard something that our hearts stop… a high pitched, terrified scream coming from other side of the door we'd just locked.

"Oh, no," I said, amazed at the randomness of it all.

"That's the girls' bathroom!" Harry gasped.

"Hermione!" we said together.

It was the last thing we wanted to do, but what choice did we have? Wheeling around, we ran back to the door and turned the key, fumbling in our panic. Harry pulled the door open and together, we ran inside.

Hermione was huddled against the wall on the far side of the huge room, screaming in terror. The troll was advancing on her, knocking the sinks off the wall with its club as it went.

"Confuse it!" Harry shouted desperately. I paused for a moment trying to figure out what he meant by that, and then I grabbed a tap, and threw as hard as I could at normal speed at the troll's head, followed by a hail of other debris too fast for anyone else to see.

The troll stopped a few feet from Hermione, reaching up to feel where I had hit him with roughly half the room's fixtures. It lumbered around, blinking stupidly, to see where the attack had come from. Its beady little eyes settled on Harry. It hesitated, then forgetting about Hermione, it made for him instead, lifting its club as it went.

"Oy," I shouted. "Pea-brain!" I threw a pipe at it.

The troll didn't even seem to notice the any of the things I was throwing at it, but it appeared to have heard me and paused again,

turning to face me instead of Harry, giving my friend time to run around it to Hermione.

"Come on, run, run, run!" Harry shouted at Hermione, trying to pull her toward the door, but she didn't seem able to move, terrified as she was, but at least her screams had stopped.

The shouting and the echoes seemed to be driving the troll berserk. It roared again and started toward me, seeming to have decided that I was nearest and had no way to escape.

Perfect, just what I wanted. If Harry could get Hermione moving and out, I could keep the troll busy until either I found it's weakness or I was forced to vibrate through a wall to escape.

But when Hermione couldn't move, and Harry found he wasn't strong enough to carry her. He also saw that I was apparently trapped. Harry then did something that was both very brave and very stupid: He took a running leap and somehow managed to end up with his arms wrapped around the troll's neck from behind.

The troll likely couldn't feel Harry hanging there, but even a troll will notice if you stick a long bit of wood up its nose, and Harry's wand had still been in his hand when he'd jumped, it had gone straight up one of the troll's nostrils.

Howling with pain, the troll twisted and flailed its club, with Harry clinging on for dear life; any second, the troll was going to rip him off or catch him with one of the wild swings of its club.

Hermione was still collapsed on the floor in fright. Realizing that I couldn't just throw things anymore, I pulled out my own wand… and drew a complete blank as to what I should cast. Out of sheer panic I heard myself shout "Wingardium Leviosa!"

Evidently, this time I'd gotten the pronunciation right. The club was wrenched out of the troll's grip and rose high, high up into the air, turned over slowly as it soared, before it dropped, with a sickening crack, onto its owner's head. The troll swayed on the spot and then fell flat on its face, with a thud that made the whole room tremble.

Harry slowly got to his feet, shaking and out of breath. I just stood where I was with my wand still raised, staring at what I had done.

As usual, it was Hermione who spoke first.

"Is it… dead?" She asked

"I don't think so," said Harry, "I think it's just been knocked out."

Bending down, Harry pulled his wand out of the troll's nose. It was covered in what looked like

lumpy gray paste.

"Ugh" he said emphatically "I'm never going to get this clean." He carefully wiped his wand on the troll's trousers.

The door slamming open made the three of us look up. We hadn't realized what a racket they had been making, but of course, someone downstairs must have heard the crashes and the troll's roars. Professor McGonagall had come bursting into the room, closely followed by Snape, with Quirrell bringing up the rear. Quirrell took one look at the troll, let out a faint whimper, and sat quickly down on a toilet, clutching his heart.

Snape bent over the troll, his wand at the ready. Both of us spotted the Potions Master's leg, which was bloody for some reason. Our attention was pulled to Professor McGonagall who was staring at Harry and me. I'd never seen her look so angry. The likelihood of being declared heroes for our actions suddenly seemed a bit remote.

"What on earth were you thinking of?" said Professor McGonagall, with cold fury in her voice. Harry looked at me, and I realized I was still standing with my wand in the air. "You're lucky you weren't killed. Why aren't you in your dormitory?"

Snape gave Harry a swift, piercing look. Harry looked at the floor.

Then a small voice came out of the shadows.

"Please, Professor McGonagall - they were looking for me."

"Miss Granger!"

Hermione had managed to get to her feet at last.

"I went looking for the troll because I… I thought I could deal with it on my own… you know,

because I've read all about them."

I dropped his wand. Hermione Granger, the world's biggest teacher's pet, was telling a downright lie to a teacher?

"If they hadn't found me, I'd be dead now. Harry stuck his wand up its nose and Ron knocked it

out with its own club. They didn't have time to come and fetch anyone. It was about to finish me off when they arrived."

I blinked. No, this wasn't right. I wasn't going to let someone else take the blame for my actions. It wasn't what heroes did. It wasn't something *Barry* would do, so it wasn't something *I* would do.

"No," I said. "Professor, Hermione is trying to take the blame for this. This is all my fault. It was because of me and my mouth that Hermione wasn't at the feast, it was because of me she wasn't there to hear about the troll. Harry and I came to warn her, figuring it was safe because the troll was supposed to be in the dungeons."

"Mr. Wesley, please. Do you really expect me to believe such a contrived story?" the Professor asked, staring at the three of us, "Miss Granger, you foolish girl, how could you think of taking on a mountain troll on your own?"

Hermione hung her head. Harry was speechless, and I quite agreed. Hermione was the last person to do anything against the rules, and our Head of House was flat out refusing to believe the truth. It was as if Snape had started handing out sweets.

"Miss Granger, five points will be taken from Gryffindor for this," said Professor McGonagall. "I'm very disappointed in you. If you're not hurt at all, you'd better get off to Gryffindor tower. Students are finishing the feast in their houses."

Harry and I watched in silence as Hermione left. Then Professor McGonagall turned to us.

"You two were insanely lucky, but not many first years could have taken on a full-grown mountain troll. You each win Gryffindor five points. Professor Dumbledore will, of course, be informed of this. Mr. Weasley, you nearly lost points in your feeble attempt to protect Miss Granger from the consequences of her actions. You may go."

We hurried out of the chamber and didn't speak at all until we had climbed two floors up. It was a relief to be away from the smell of the troll, quite apart from anything else.

"I can't believe old McGonagall believed Hermione's lies over my truth, " I grumbled.

"Hey," Harry consoled me, "At least we got points. Five anyway, once she's taken off Hermione's."

"It was nice of her to try to get us out of trouble like that," I admitted. "Mind you, we did save her."

"She might not have needed saving if we hadn't locked the thing in with her," Harry reminded

me.

We had reached the portrait of the Fat Lady, and offered the password.

The common room was packed and noisy. Everyone was eating the food that had been sent up.

Hermione, however, was waiting for us at door. There was a very embarrassed pause while we tried to think of what to say to each other. Then, none of us looking at either of the others, we all said "Thanks," and hurried off to get something to eat.

From that moment on, Hermione Granger became our friend. There are some things you can't share without ending up bonding, and fighting a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them.

Did I say the Hermione always followed the rules?

The next few months proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that either Harry and I were world class corrupters of innocent rule followers, or that we didn't know Miss Granger very well.

This girl was involved in smuggling a dragon from the school…

Yeah, a dragon.

No, not a monitor lizard or a komodo. A dragon. As in fire breathing, wings and evil intent.

Yes, I'm serious.

They grow to about the size of a bus, but this one was only a hatchling. A horribly evil vicious little hatchling. It was about three feet long when we got rid of it.

Well, Hagrid, the grounds keeper was insane about animals. The more massive and evil the better. He's always wanted a pet dragon, so when someone offered him a dragon's egg, he didn't even hesitate.

He completely forgot he lived in a wooden hut and that dragons are born belching fire.

Yeah.

No, I wasn't around for the great adventure of smuggling the dragon off the grounds, because the little monster bit me.

Yeah, even with my metabolism, I still swelled up like a balloon, so I missed out on getting the beast to my older brother Charlie… And I missed out on them getting caught, and the detention they had in the Forbidden Forest the next night.

Yeah. Forbidden Forest.

Well, 'Forbidden' as in going into the forest was likely to have you end up dead.

Yes, I'm serious. Why would I make something like that up?

Well, centaurs, who aren't necessarily all that friendly. Spiders.

I hate spiders.

Laugh it up. I'd like to see you in the middle of a acromantula colony when they decide you're no longer a friend, but dinner.

Well, yeah. Acromantula are sentient, and some of them can speak English.

About the size of a car.

Again, why would I make something like that up? The bloody things are terrifying.

I don't know about any square cube law, but I've personally seen an acromantula larger than my dad's Ford Anglia hanging from a strand of silk as thick as my wrist. Observation overrules so-called laws every time.

Hell, I don't know. Let's just say 'magic' and leave it at that.

Anyway, Hermione got her first ever detention, and ended up in the Forbidden Forest with Harry, Neville and Malfoy, and Harry encountered the Dark Wizard that killed his parents when he interrupted a unicorn being killed, all the while I was laying in the hospital wing moaning about my swollen arm.

Then, at a Quidditch match she set a teacher on fire thinking he was cursing Harry.

Well, no. The teacher was Snape, and it turned out that he was counter cursing Harry to protect him from the teacher who was actually cursing him, but setting Snape on fire distracted the bad guy long enough that Harry caught the snitch and won the game.

I'm still not positive that we were the ones corrupting her.

Based on Snape's bloody leg that Harry and I observed on Halloween and his apparent cursing of Harry's broom, he and I

came to the conclusion that he was after the Philosopher's Stone. Hermione disagreed, but she did agree that something was going on.

It all came to a head at the end of the school year. We were all convinced that Snape was making a final push to get to the stone. We tried to go to the teachers, but none of the staff would believe us, and the Headmaster had been called to the Ministry of Magic. The three of us decided that we needed to prevent the Stone from being stolen by stealing it ourselves.

Just how stupid I was back then can be summed up in three words.

I was a preteen hero, a speedster capable of moving through walls and whatever traps the staff had placed to protect the Stone. I had a secret identity, so the most obvious thing for me to do would be to get away from Harry and Hermione and use my speed to retrieve the Stone before Snape (or whoever was after it) could blink. And that very opportunity presented itself to me, courtesy of my best friend.

"Well, there you are," Harry said quietly, pointing at the door to Fluffy's room where it hung ajar, "Snape's already got past Fluffy."

Seeing the open door somehow seemed to impress upon all three of us what we were facing. Underneath the invisibility cloak, Harry turned face Hermione and me.

"If you want to go back, I won't blame you," he said. "You can take the cloak, I won't need it now."

Remember those three words that could sum up how stupid I was? Here they are: "Don't be stupid," I said, totally missing the irony.

"We're coming," Hermione agreed.

Harry pushed the door open.

Inside we discovered the Cerberus waking up, Harry put the dog back to sleep with a handmade flute Hagrid had given him for

Christmas. From there we encountered some Devil's Snare, which Hermione saved us from with her bluebell flames after a bit of proding, from there we encountered a room with a door that could only be unlocked by a single key among hundreds of keys… and did I mention these keys flew with wings? It took the three of us on brooms to catch it, with me boxing it in from above and Hermione from below so that Harry could snag it.

Once we had the key, we opened the locked door.

"Ready?" Harry asked us, his hand on the door handle. We nodded and he pulled the door open.

The next chamber was so dark we couldn't see anything at all. But as we entered the room, light suddenly flooded the room to reveal that we were standing on the edge of a huge chessboard, behind the black chessmen. Facing us, across the room, were the white pieces. Harry, Hermione and I stood silently for several moments taking it all in. I couldn't help it, I started to grin.

"Now what do we do?" Harry whispered.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" I asked. "We've got to play our way across the room."

Behind the white pieces they could see another door.

"How?" asked Hermione nervously.

"I think," I explained, "we're going to have to be chessmen."

I approached the Queen's black knight reaching out to stroke the horse's mane. At once, the stone sprang to life. The horse pawed the ground and the knight turned his helmeted head to look down at me.

"Do we need to join you to get across?" I asked.

The black knight nodded in response.

I turned to my friends.

"This needs thinking about…" I said. "I suppose we've got to take the place of three of the black pieces…"

Harry and Hermione stayed quiet, watching me think.

The plan came together in my mind. "Now, don't be offended or anything, but neither of you are that good at chess…"

"We know, and we're not offended," said Harry. "Just tell us what to do."

"Harry, you take the place of King's bishop, and Hermione, you replace the Queen's Rook."

"What about you?" She asked.

"I'm going to be a knight," I said.

The chessmen seemed to have been listening, because at these words the knight dismounted and along with the bishop, and rook turned their backs on the white pieces and walked off the board, leaving three empty squares that Harry and Hermione took.

"White always plays first in chess," I said, mounting the stone horse and peering across the board.

A white pawn had moved forward two squares.

In response I directed the black pieces. They moved silently wherever I sent them.

"Harry," I called out. "Move forward diagonally four squares to the right."

I think Harry and Hermione were shocked when the King's knight was taken. The white queen smashed him to the floor and dragged him off the board, where he lay quite still, facedown.

"Had to let that happen," I said, not taking my eyes from the board. "Leaves you free to take that bishop, Hermione, go on."

Every time one of our men was lost, the white pieces showed no

mercy. Soon there was a huddle of limp black players slumped along the wall. Twice, I only just noticed in time that Harry and Hermione were in danger. I darted around the board, taking almost as many white pieces as we had lost black ones.

"We're nearly there," I said. "If white makes the wrong move…"

The white queen turned her blank face toward me.

"Yes…" I said softly, "It's the only way… I've got to be taken."

"NO!" Harry and Hermione shouted.

"That's chess!" I snapped. "You've got to make some sacrifices! I make my move and she'll take me… that will leave you free to checkmate the king, Harry!"

"But Ron!"

"Do you want to stop Snape or not?" I asked.

"Ron…" Hermione whispered.

"Look," I insisted. "If the pair of you don't hurry up, he'll already have the Stone!"

It had finally occurred to me that I needed to get away from Harry and Hermione so that my speed could contribute to the fight. There really was no alternative.

"Ready?" I called, "Here I go… now, don't hang around once we've won."

I stepped two squares forward and one to the left, and the white queen pounced. I expected that she would strike at me as she had the King's Knight earlier. That's the only excuse I've got for being caught by surprise when her blow came through the stone horse I rode. I'd never been hit harder. Oblivion claimed me.

Hermione's face swam into focus in front of me.

"Ron," she said. "wake up, we've got to get help."

"What?" I asked intelligently. "Where's Harry?"

"After you were hurt, we went on," she explained, while trying to pull me to my feet. "We got to a point where only one person could go on. Harry's alone, we need to get help."

"You go," I said as I feigned more weakness than I felt. "I'll slow you down. I'm ok now, once I'm more steady on my feet, I'll follow you."

The indecision on Hermione's face was almost too much for me, but then she decided and said "I'll be back as soon as I can."

I waited until she was gone before I got to my feet, and for the first time that day, I ran.

The room after the chess room contained a troll, one laying on the stone floor unconscious. Had Harry and Hermione had to fight it, or was this an example of Snape's handiwork?

I passed through to the next room and found a wall of black flames in front of me. The wall behind me suddenly flared in purple fire.

A trap, I thought as I moved through the room, pausing to examine the small table with the seven crystal vials and the sheet of parchment.

I decided that the potions were unimportant and passed through the black fire, vibrating thought the wall.

It wasn't Snape. The man attacking Harry was Quirrell.

I didn't? I'm sure I told you about Quirrell. Timid fellow, completely out of place in his subject, he wore a turban and stunk of garlic.

No? Ok, well now you know all about Quirrell, only now I could see that his turban was missing and on the back of his head was another face. Chalk white flesh, with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake. Voldemort.

"Seize him! SEIZE HIM!" shrieked Voldemort, and Quirrell lunged, knocking Harry off his feet landing on top of him, both hands around Harry's neck.

I moved. Across the room before Quirrell, either of his faces, could blink, I clouted him upside the head, sending the man off of Harry and sliding across the stone floor.

Quirrell howled in agony, there was no way my hitting him could cause that.

"Master, I cannot hold him" my teacher cried. "My hands… my hands!"

Quirrell rose from where he had landed after I hit him and stared, bewildered, at his own hand. I could see they looked burned, raw, red, and shiny.

"Then kill him, fool, and be done!" Voldemort screeched from his place on the back of Quirrell's head.

Quirrell raised his wand to perform a deadly curse, but I snatched the wand away and Harry, seemingly by instinct, reached up and grabbed Quirrell's face…

The screams were horrific. Quirrell rolled away from Harry, his face blistering. It was obvious to me that Harry understood: Quirrell couldn't bear to touch his bare skin, not without suffering terrible pain, his only chance was to keep hold of Quirrell, keep him in enough pain to stop him from doing a curse.

Harry jumped to his feet, caught Quirrell by the arm, and hung on as tight as he could. Quirrell screamed and tried to throw Harry off. I could tell that Harry was hurting as well. The air filled with Quirrell's screams and Voldemort shouting, "KILL HIM! KILL HIM!" and perhaps even my own voice pleading for Harry to release Quirrell so that I could help.

In a sudden burst of strength, Quirrell wrenched his arm from Harry's grip. Harry fell to the ground and hit his head, losing consciousness."

Quirrell collapsed to the stone floor next to Harry and with a final rattling breath, died.

I slowed into visibility, and watched as a vaporous wraith rose from Quirrell's body. The wraith hovered for a moment and then moved toward Harry.

I grabbed for it, to prevent what I knew had to be Voldemort from possessing my best friend as he had my teacher.

My hand passed through the wraith, but somehow, the interaction of my aura appeared to cause the wraith pain. Moving as quickly as I could I grabbed again, and again and again, thousands of time in seconds…

And the wraith fled through the wall.

I considered following it, but I knew I didn't have much time. I checked Harry as best I could, and then returned to the chess room to wait for 'rescue.'

Hermione ended up spending more time in the Hospital wing than I did. Madam Pomfrey, the school nurse did a quick scan on me and said, "Why are you wasting my time, Mr. Weasley?"

I bit back on my snark and settled down outside the infirmary to wait.

Hermione was released after another hour, and she joined me. Together we waited. We ignored our classes, leaving only to eat and sleep. Harry didn't wake for three days, and even then it was well after dinner before the Headmaster had seen Harry and the Nurse let us in.

And she let Ron and Hermione in. "Only five minutes!" Madam Pomfrey warned.

"Harry!" Hermione looked ready to hug Harry again, but it was clear that Harry was glad she held herself in as his head was still very sore. "Oh, Harry, we were sure you were going to… Dumbledore was so worried…"

"The whole school's talking about it," I said. "Are you ok?"

It was one of those rare occasions when the true story is even more strange and exciting than the wild rumors. Harry told us everything, at least as he knew it: Quirrell; the mirror; the Stone; and Voldemort. Hermione and I were a very good audience; we gasped in all the right places, and when Harry told them what was under Quirrell's turban, Hermione screamed out loud.

"So the Stone's gone?" I asked finally. "The Flamel's just going to die?"

"That's what I asked, but Dumbledore thinks that… what was it? 'To the well-organized mind,

death is but the next great adventure.'"

"I always said he was off his rocker," I noted, quite impressed despite it all at how crazy the Headmaster was.

"So what happened to you two?" Harryasked.

"Well, I got back all right," said Hermione. "I brought Ron round, but he was too weak to make it back, so I was dashing up to the owlery to contact Dumbledore when I met him in the entrance hall… he already knew what we had done, he just said, 'Harry's gone after him, hasn't he?' and hurried off to the third floor with me following."

"D'you think he meant you to do it?" I asked. "Sending you your father's cloak and everything?"

"I don't know," said Harry thoughtfully. "He's a funny man, Dumbledore. I think he sort of wanted to give me a chance. I think he knows more or less everything that goes on here, you know. I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help. I don't think it was an accident he let me find out how the mirror worked. It's almost like he thought I had the right to face Voldemort if I could…"

"Yeah, Dumbledore's off his rocker, all right," I said proudly. "Listen, you've got to be up for the end-of-year feast tomorrow. The points are all in and Slytherin won, of course. You missed the last

Quidditch match, we were steamrollered by Ravenclaw without you, but the food'll be good."

At that moment, Madam Pomfrey bustled over.

"You've had nearly fifteen minutes, now OUT" she said firmly.

Once outside the infirmary, Hermione and I returned to our common room in far better spirits than we had been in since we had returned from our adventure with Harry.

In the end, the leaving feast had some surprises. Slytherin had won the House cup, but at the awards ceremony, Dumbledore came up with a bunch of last minutes points for our adventure defending the Stone.

It was unfair, and I knew it, but just the look on Malfoy's face made me forget about 'fair play'.

Shallow of me, I know.

On the train ride back to King's Cross, Hermione fretted over her final exams (always mental, that one) and Harry showed us the photo album that Hagrid had put together for him, with photos of his Mum and Dad from before he was born.

I'd never seen Harry so happy over any possession, not even his invisibility cloak, or his wand.

I promised to try to get permission for him to come stay over for part of the summer.

Then we were at the station and I watched as my two best friends vanished into the Muggle world.

I needed to talk to Barry about dealing with wraiths, and I need to hang out with Wally a bit. If Harry was going to come stay with us, that would cut into my Hero training. If first year at Hogwarts had taught me nothing else, it was that I needed a whole lot more practice.

"Good year Ron?" Mum asked as we made our way to the public floo access.

"Only the best Mum," I assured her. "I can't wait for next year."

Chapter 3

A/N: I do not own Harry Potter. Nor any of the DC Comics Characters mentioned herein. But you knew that.

Speed

Ten minutes to go.

Have I mentioned how much I hate waiting?

The Death Eaters have gathered at the edge of the wards. There was no sign of their master, of course. A drama queen like Voldemort needed to make an entrance, after all.

Not for the first time I wondered if we could rid the world of a whole lot of evil if, we just provided each Dark Lord type with a stage and a spotlight so that they could show the world just how wonderful and talented they were.

Harry had his wand pointed to the sky as he started the chant for the defensive spell the Padma had found in her family's archives. A nasty bit of magic she called Shiva's Trisul. On the second verse of the chant, Padma and Parvati joined in. Harry was providing the power; Padma and Parvati provided the control.

Evidently, The Patil bloodline somehow powered this spell. Without a Patil in the mix, no power in the world would make the spell work. With two, the effect doubled.

Hermione called the whole idea of magic tied to a bloodline to be simultaneously very cool and exceedingly unfair. I fully expected to see a whole array of new spells tied to the Granger bloodline before terribly long.

High above us, at the peak of the dome that constitutes the range of the Hogwarts wards, a roiling mass of… something formed. With each verse of the chant, the cloud of magic got larger, and if possible scarier.

Just looking at it made you very happy you weren't anywhere near it.

Finishing his chant, Harry fell to his knees, exhausted from the effort. The Patil's finished their chants, and as one, brought their wands down with a flourish. The mass at the top of the dome began flowing down, following the curvature of the wards.

The Death Eaters saw what was coming for them, and immediately the flare of shield spells lit up their ranks. The smarter among them either ran or apparated away. Apparently, there weren't a whole lot of smart Death Eaters.

As soon as the magic of the spell washed over the Death Eaters, they turned on each other, forgetting their wands, they attacked each other using their hands and feet… and teeth.

"Bloody hell!" I breathed.

"It only last for about five minutes," Padma noted while she and Parvati helped Harry to his feet.

"Five minutes ought to be enough," Parvati said with a grim smile. "Let's hope we don't need to haul out the really nasty family stuff."

That wasn't the 'really nasty stuff? I stood in open-mouthed shock as the Death Eaters continued in their attempts to tear each other limb from limb. If that wasn't the 'really nasty stuff', what did the Patil family do to people who really make them angry?

That was when the thought hit me. Had I ever apologized to Padma for the way I treated her at the Yule Ball 4th year?

Fourth Year

I was fourteen.

And I was an utter twat.

It had been a very bad year and I had been lashing out at everyone who mattered to me.

The year started with Wally getting sick. Barry had reached out to his fellow heroes, to the Muggle healers and I had even found Healers from the magical community to consult, but Wally was still dying. Worse, every time he used his speed, he died a little more.

Asking someone who has known the Speed Force not to run is a lot like asking them not to breathe, but everyone was asking Wally not to run.

Then, something happened. There was some horrendous battle between the Heroes of the world (other than me. For some reason no one thought to call me.) and a group of villains lead by someone called 'Anti-Monitor'. I only found out about it after everything was over, and Barry was gone. My Mentor was killed while I was cheering for Ireland at the Quidditch World Cup, and we didn't even have his body to bury.

Wally had responded to the emergency, ignoring what it was costing him. That was what Barry had taught us. When the world is in danger, you go. When Barry died, he unleashed some sort of energy that washed over Wally and Wally's illness was healed.

At least we got that small glimmer of hope from the disaster.

However, whatever had been happening to Wally still had a cost. His link to the Speed Force was somehow reduced… limited… His top speed was just over the speed of sound. In addition, his metabolism was tied to the Speed Force for the first time, something like my own is, only worse. Whereas I have become something of a legend at Hogwarts for my ability to inhale (several) meals, I can operate normally between them. Wally on the other hand had to eat constantly to maintain his speed.

I wasn't sure how to deal with Wally, just seeing him in Barry's uniform was enough to push me into a rage. Of course, pretty much anything was enough to push me into a rage then.

Everything that happened changed Wally. My happy go lucky cousin was gone, replaced by a very focused man. He abandoned his 'Kid Flash' identity and took up Barry's Flash personae. He said that he was giving the illusion that the Flash was still on duty. Between

bouts of rage and sorrow, as far as I was concerned the Flash *was* still on duty.

Meanwhile I, personally, reacted to all the changes in my life with all the maturity that I had.

Which is to say none.

The school year opened with an announcement that Quidditch had been canceled for the year. In all honesty, at the time, Quidditch was far more important to me than anything else in my life at school, so I stomped about the castle moaning to everyone who would listen. I know I annoyed Hermione to the point of screaming with it, and I think I even got to Harry once or twice.

Sometimes having a secret like this really hurts. I think I needed to talk about Barry, but there was no one I could talk to, not even my best friends.

However, it took me until Halloween to become the most complete bastard I could be. That was the year that Hogwarts hosted the Triwizard Tournament, the reason they cancelled Quidditch. This was the first Tournament held in a couple of centuries. The Triwizard Tournament is a huge contest between the three largest European schools of Magic, Durmstrang, Beauxbatons, and Hogwarts that pitted a single student from each school against each other. Like most of the boys attending Hogwarts at the time, I wanted to be the Hogwarts Champion. The contest promised glory and fame, and I hoped a distraction against the parts of my life I wanted to forget. The thousand Galleons would be nice too.

It never occurred to me that despite the claims of 'eternal glory', I had no idea who the previous Hogwarts champion had been. Then it was announced that the minimum age to join in the competition was seventeen, dashing my hopes.

Entry into the contest was by magical selection of volunteers. To volunteer, one would place a slip of parchment with your name on it the Goblet of Fire. When the time came, the magic of the Goblet would select one champion from each school.

To limit the volunteers to those of age, the Headmaster had drawn an Age Line around the goblet.

An Age Line.

Well, it's a magic barrier that looks like a thin golden line had been traced on the floor, forming a circle ten feet around it in every direction. You know, an Age Line.

Well, that depends on who cast it, doesn't it? The Headmaster wasn't looking to hurt anyone, he was the type to use humor to make his point. For example my twin brothers were a bit less than six months short of turning 17, so they brewed up an aging potion to bump up their age a bit.

Of course they work, to a point.

Well, no. The potion didn't confuse the Age Line for a second. It let them through the line, and let them put their names in the Goblet, before it aged them into their 90s, forced grew long beards to match Dumbledore's on each of them, and caused their names to be spat out of the goblet in flames.

Yeah, it was hilarious.

Why did I describe myself as a twat?

Harry's name came out of the Goblet of Fire.

Yeah, he was my age, we were both 14, so no, he wasn't old enough.

No, see, that was the point. He didn't enter. Even without the benefit of hindsight, it should have been obvious from the look on his face when Dumbledore called his name that Harry was shocked to be chosen.

Of course, back then, no one ever accused me of being too well acquainted with the bloody obvious.

Oh, I completely lost my mind. Harry had something I wanted, so of course he must have cheated to get it. I was quite oblivious to the fact that this was likely the latest attempt to kill him at Hogwarts.

You would think that after three years and at least five blatant attempts to kill him, and generally Hermione and me because we were near him when it happened, that the likelihood of this being the latest attempt might have occurred to me, but no.

Oh, I ranted and raved at him, tried to force Hermione to choose between us and was, as I said, generally a twat.

I like to pretend that it was the culmination of everything that had happened that year, Wally getting sick, Barry dying, and Wally's recovery and new limitations, but I'm not sure if that was the real reason.

Maybe I'm just a jealous twat.

All I knew is that I needed to talk to someone without having to keep any secrets.

Wally was having his own problems at the time and really didn't need me whinging about mine, so I went to see Max.

Max was originally a scout with the US Cavalry in the 1830s. Yeah, the horse and bugle people. He made friends with local Red-Indian tribe and…

What?

'Politically correct'? What's that?

Really?

Ok, fine, Native American tribe then. Max was away on a mission of some kind, when that tribe ended up being massacred by his own unit. It turns out I wasn't the first Speedster to get his power through magic. When Max returned, he found and tried to save the tribe's dying shaman, who enchanted him, bestowing super-speed upon

Max.

No, he wasn't the first of us, there have been lots of speedsters, he's just the first we've found who got his speed from magic. Max became known as Windrunner.

As far as anyone has been able to tell, Max was also the first of us to discover the source of our powers, the Speed Force. He tried to reach it, to learn what it was. He failed, claiming to have 'bounced off' the dimensional barrier and found himself decades into his future, the first time ending up in the 1890s, where he created a new identity for himself as Whip Whirlwind.

No, I don't know why he changed his name. I mean if he was as successful at keeping his secret identity as he said he was, then no one should have known the difference. Anyway, Max would live for a while in the new time period he found himself in, and then try and fail to reach the Speed force again, moving forward in his personal time line each time. He had a fair number of identities. After Whip Whirlwind, he was Wisp, Quicksilver, and then finally Mercury. It was while he was Mercury he met and mentored the first Flash, Jay Garrick, who much later was Barry's inspiration. Then his last try to reach the Speed Force had him end up in my time, where I think he was tired of the whole Secret Identity thing and just called himself Max Mercury.

From your questions, I take it you don't know him?

Anyway, I went to talk to Max. He had pretty much taken the position of the Grumpy Old Man of the Speedsters, and you could always count on him to listen to you and tell you what a whiner you were.

Yeah, I know, but it still seemed to help.

As soon as I managed to convince him that I really needed to talk to him, which wasn't an easy thing to do, he sat me down at his kitchen table, put a beer in front of me and told me to tell him what the problem was.

What?

Yeah, a beer. Why?

Oh, I see. No, think about it. With my metabolism, I couldn't drink fast enough to even get a buzz. My body looks at a beer and giggles a bit at how cute it is to be trying to affect me in any meaningful way. Especially with the yellow water yanks call beer. I mean come on.

All Max was doing was showing me he was going to treat me like an adult. Hell, that's the only reason he even had beer, since it had the same effect on him.

Anyway, I poured out my tale of woe, and Max listened. When I was done, he reached over and slapped me on the back of the head.

"Ron," he said. "Pull your head out of your ass. Barry is gone, and it is ok to grieve, really it is. Wally is wearing Barry's colors now and has taken the name. It's ok to not be comfortable with that, and it's ok to feel bad that your cousin is so limited with his speed now."

"I know that," I responded, rubbing the back of my head. For an old man, Max could smack you pretty hard.

"As far as your school friend goes, what the hell is wrong with you? You've told me since you met him that he's a good kid, that he's famous for something he had nothing to do with and doesn't even remember, and he hates it, that he'd give you the shirt off his back if you needed it. And he's almost been killed every single year, so of course you think that he stole your chance."

"Well, I guess," I sighed.

"Friends like you've made are rare treasures Ron," the old man said. "Try not to allow Barry's loss to make you throw away something you'll likely never find again."

Max looked up to the clock on the wall. "Now get out of here. Wally is supposed to be here in fifteen minutes so that we can see what is going on with his access to the Speed Force, and he doesn't need your whining distracting him."

"Thank's Max," I said as I started to run.

What?

Yeah, every year.

Well, when the cursed broom tried to throw him off and when he confronted Voldemort in front of the mirror first year. Second year my sister Ginny was possessed by an enchanted diary, Harry ended up having to face the spirit of a 16 year old Voldemort and a 60 foot long basilisk to save her.

Me? I was stuck with the professor who tried to obliviate us with my broken wand and ended up completely obliviating himself. I never came closer to saying to hell to my secret identity. I still wasn't fast enough to have him think I was still there. I was a minute away from leaving him and letting the bastard tell any story he wanted, when Harry got back with Ginny.

Obliviate? That's a spell that can undo memories.

'Mind wipe'? Yeah, that sounds like what Lockhart did to himself. He had no idea who he was. Anyway third year, I showed what a hero I was by getting my leg broken by a dog, which turned out to be Harry's godfather.

Oh, sorry. Sirius Black was Harry's godfather, and he was also an animagus. That's a witch or wizard with an animal form. Sirius' form was a big black dog. At the time we also thought he was a homicidal Death Eater who had turned the Potters over to Voldemort. But, it turned out he wasn't.

No, Sirius was sent to Azkaban prison without a trial because he was well and truly framed by the real traitor, Peter Pettigrew, who was also an animagus, only his form was a rat. Specifically My rat.

Yeah, I know.

No, I know. Believe me it kept me up late at night, wondering at the sheer coincidence that had Pettigrew hiding by becoming a pet for my family years before I became Harry's friend. Of course the coincidences in this story are still coming.

Harry's father James Potter had three dorm mates while he was at Hogwarts. Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew, and Remus Lupin. In our third year, Sirius escaped from Prison, Peter was exposed as my pet rat Scabbers, and Remus was our Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor. James, Sirius, and Peter were all animagi, a Stag, a Dog, and a Rat respectively.

No, Remus wasn't an animagus. He was a werewolf.

It's a long story, but basically they were best friends until the Potters were killed. Sirius went to prison, Peter was believed dead and Remus thought that his world had fallen apart. It was really messed up.

And then Remus tried to kill Harry and Hermione.

No, that came out wrong. We had evidence to clear Sirius in the fact that Pettigrew was still alive, but somehow, everyone forgot that it was the first night of a full moon, Remus transformed, Peter escaped, Snape of all people ended up defending us against Remus.

Yeah I know.

We ended up scattered, Hermione and I were taken to the Hospital wing by Snape, Harry and Sirius were attacked by Dementors before they were found, Sirius was arrested and was waiting to be executed and Harry joined us in the hospital wing.

I was stuck there, because of my broken leg. I couldn't just use my speed to heal myself because the school nurse had already seen me. Harry and Hermione used a time turner to go back in time and…

A time turner. It's a magical time travel device. One will let you travel into the past, and has a maximum range of about a day.

Oh, Hermione had one.

So that she could attend more classes. She was basically taking every class available, at least until she walked out of Divination because the professor was a hack.

I never said that made any sense, that's just what happened. Hermione about killed herself using it. The model she had only had a range of a few hours, so she was in class or studying for like 20 hours a day

So, Harry and Hermione used her time turner and stopped Buckbeak's execution…

Buckbeak. The hippogriff.

Look, it doesn't matter, and I'm getting way off point. Harry and Hermione rode Buckbeak to the tower Sirius was being held in and rescued him. He was still a fugitive, but at least he was free.

So, yeah. Every year we were at Hogwarts, someone tried to kill Harry, sometimes multiple times.

Max made sense. I knew he was probably right. Nevertheless, I couldn't bring myself to do what I knew I should do. I was so wrapped up in feeling sorry for myself that I never responded when my brother Charlie tried to contact me to let me know he was at Hogwarts.

Hell, I never stopped to wonder what he was even doing at Hogwarts, which was pretty stupid.

Oh, I found out what Charlie was doing there all right. But, not until November 24th and the first Task of the Tournament.

My brother was a Dragon handler, and for the first task, the champions had to face Dragons.

I sat transfixed as the Champions, one by one, faced off against a nesting Dragon guarding her clutch. The goal for each of them was to remove a golden egg from the Dragon's nest, without harming the dragon or the eggs.

As I watched, it occurred to me that I didn't know a single one of the

spells Krum, Delacour, or Diggory used… I wondered how Harry was going to get out of this mess.

Finally, it was Harry's turn, and he emerged from the waiting area, looking small and terrified.

That's when it really sunk in what a twat I was being. Harry hadn't figured a way out of the task. He was trapped, actually having to face a nesting dragon, with all the skills of someone three months into his 4th year. The horror stories Charlie told of other handlers who had made mistakes while facing dragons, and the ways they had died filled my mind. I started to rise from my seat to try and help Harry when Hermione's hand fell on top of mine and squeezed hard, anchoring me to the spot.

Harry summoned his broom and *outflew* the dragon.

Hell, yes that is unusual. Dragons are the planets apex predators, and they hunt while flying. No wizard has ever bested a dragon in the air… until that day.

Hermione evidently didn't know that, somehow missing it in her research. She was bouncing up and down in her seat, still crushing my hands babbling "It worked, it worked, it worked."

For anyone other than Harry, or maybe Krum, it would have been suicide.

I'd known I was wrong. I'd known it and carried on with feeling sorry for myself and going out of my way to blame Harry for it.

I had to make this right.

I had to.

"Ron," Harry said staring at me as if I were a Malfoy when he entered our dorm.

"Look, Harry," I said, trying to find the words. "I've been an arse."

"True," he agreed.

"If it will help, you can punch me in the face," I offered. "I totally deserve it."

"So, all it took to convince you that I was telling the truth was seeing a dragon try to kill me?"

"No, not really," I shook my head, more than a little relieved that he hadn't taken me up on my 'punch me' offer. "I think I knew that you were telling the truth from the beginning, but I convinced myself that if you got something I wanted without even trying, that I was being cheated, and I…"

Harry leaned into me and drove his fist into my stomach. I pitched forward gasping for breath and tried not to vomit.

"Ron," Harry whispered into my ear. "Never punch someone in the face. Too many bones in the face, you'll hurt your hand. Go for the soft tissue. I learned that from my cousin."

I looked up at him, still trying to catch my breath. His face shifted from anger to that crooked smile of his. "Don't do it again, Ron. I won't forgive you if it happens again."

"Never," I promised.

"Come on then," Harry said. "I was so nervous before the task; I couldn't eat, so I'm starving now. Let's go to the kitchen."

"We should get Hermione," I suggested.

"You're right," Harry agreed. "She'll be happy we're not fighting."

Just like that, everything was, if not ok, then at least better.

For all of two weeks.

Oh, Harry and I were good, and Hermione was overjoyed that we had made up, though she never understood his punching me, and

scolded us both at length about it.

In short, I crawled out of my head and life was better. I'd gone to see Wally and we finally talked, really talked about what Barry had meant to us.

Then it happened. The worst thing possible.

McGonagall announced there was going to be a ball.

Oh laugh it up. I mean, *dancing* ? At school? Where everyone could see you?

And to make things worse, we had to have dates.

Sometimes I think someone up there hates me.

Harry and I reacted to this problem the same way we did most of the problems we encountered that didn't involve the risk of life and limb. We kept putting it off until the deadline was almost on top of us.

We put it off until a week before the ball. McGonagall had been asking Harry about his date, since the Champions were required to open the ball with a dance. Finally facing what was coming, Harry and I decided to aim high.

Apparently, we aimed way too high. Harry had been hung up on Cho Chang all year. Cho was the Ravenclaw house Seeker, so she and Harry had confronted each other over the pitch several times, and Harry was head over heels in lust with her.

No, it couldn't have been love, looking back on it now. I doubt they exchanged two dozen words prior to the day he asked her to the Yule Ball.

Yeah, well, we were 14, and for the most part idiots. I don't know about any of you, but I look back on how I was at that age and wonder how I managed to move my arms and legs with the minimal amount of brain power I was using.

Cho turned Harry down. She was, it turned out dating Cedric Diggory, the other Hogwarts Champion, and was going to the ball with him.

Me, I shot REALLY high. I asked Fleur Delacour to the ball. Fleur was 17, the Champion from Beauxbaton, gorgeous beyond all reason, and a Veela.

Veela, they're the people the legends of Wood Nymphs come from. They radiate a sexual allure that can stupefy men. Not that I really needed stupefying.

She turned me down. At least she didn't laugh… while I was standing in front of her.

So, there we were, dateless, a week before the ball.

I, of course, managed to make things worse. It's a gift I have.

Harry and I were alternating between moaning about the unfairness of it all and working on our homework with Hermione supervising, as usual, when I realized I'd been missing something very important while not paying attention.

"Say, Hermione," I said, looking up from my Charms assignment. "You're a girl."

"Well spotted Ron, I always knew I'd never be able to hide that from you," she said sarcastically.

"No, see," I continued. "You could go with one of us, and that would mean we'd only have to find one other girl without a date."

"Your assumptions aside, Ronald," she said, her sarcasm spiking, "I can't go with either of you, I have a date."

By this point, I'd known Hermione for more than three years. If she was calling me, 'Ronald' then I had screwed up somehow. Though, for the life of me, I couldn't see where.

"Funny, Hermione," I replied. "Look this is important, do you know any other girl who doesn't have a date yet? Someone hot?"

"Oh," she spat, "so my having a date has to be a joke does it?"

"Ron," Harry hissed, "shut up…"

"Harry," Hermione said as she stood up gathering her homework materials together, "I think I'm done for tonight. The last I heard, Parvati hadn't been asked to the ball yet. An intelligent fellow would ask her as soon as possible, as in right now."

With that, she stormed up the stairs to the girls' dorm.

"What's wrong with her?" I asked Harry, who just shook his head sadly before rising from the table.

I watched as he crossed the common room to where Parvati was sitting. I couldn't hear what he said to her, but she smiled and nodded.

Well Harry had a date then. He looked over at me and seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then said something more to Parvati, who looked over at me with an expression of distaste.

She returned her attention to Harry who shrugged. The pair spoke for several more minutes, before she nodded and a smiling Harry returned to our table and his homework.

"Parvati has agreed to go to the ball with me," he said quietly. "And her sister Padma doesn't have a date yet. Parvati promised to put in a good word for you, but you have to ask Padma."

Padma said yes.

Of course, since it was me, it wasn't that easy. First, she promised much pain if I were to get handsy. The then demonstrated that her skill with a wand was more than enough to deliver on her promise.

Why were all the girls in my life so scary?

Then she wanted to see my dress robes, so we would match. I dug them out of my trunk, where they had been since my Mum bought

them. Stupidly, I brought them, still in their unopened packaging to let Padma see my outfit.

It turns out that Mum hates me. You wouldn't believe the purple monstrosity that outfit turned out to be. From the look of horror on Padma's face, I thought she was going to call the whole thing off, right then and there, but she took pity on me and told me that she could 'fix' them, but that I would 'owe' her.

I tried not to think about that.

I turned on the dance floor with my left hand very carefully placed on her right hip in a way that couldn't possible give any offence, her right hand in mine, and my attention fully focused on Hermione.

At some point over the last three years, our bucktoothed bookworm of a friend had, somehow, blossomed into a beauty. Moreover, it was driving me mad. She was attending the Yule Ball with Viktor Krum as her date.

Krum. The best seeker in professional Quidditch. Rich, successful, outrageously popular, not all that good looking, sort of bandy legged, and he was with Hermione.

What?

Yeah, he was the top Seeker in the league while a 6th year at Durmstang, come his seventh year, the year of the Triwizard Tournament, his team came in second in the World Cup and he became the highest paid player in the league.

Well, sure, it's unusual, but he was just that good. There had been others, before him, and Harry would have likely gone pro himself when he turned 16 if not for the war.

Back to my story, I'd already been as much of an arse as I was willing to be that year, so I tried to swallow what I was feeling, and pay attention to my date. After all, Padma had taken mercy on me, and had even fixed my hideous formal robes. Despite that, anytime I wasn't specifically speaking to the Ravenclaw, my attention moved

to Hermione, what she was doing, what her expression seemed to be saying, everything.

I knew, from five tables away, that she had the halibut for dinner. I couldn't tell you what I had if you paid me.

Of course, Padma, being a Ravenclaw, knew I wasn't paying attention to her.

"Ron," she said.

"Yeah?" I asked, pulling my attention away from Hermione back to my date.

"I think we're done for the night."

"What?" I asked intelligently.

"Dinner was lovely, and you don't dance badly for someone paying me no attention," she sighed. "But I think I'd like to have a little fun with someone who wanted to be with me."

I felt my face heat up, "Sorry."

"You should be," Padma said as the song ended and we returned to our table. "Harry was surprised by how Hermione looked as well, but he's been giving Parvati his attention. I'm not really mad at you Ron, you've been rude, but I let you, so I suppose we both share in the blame, but mostly you."

She gathered her things and rose from her chair. "A bit of advice, Ron. Talk to her."

I spent the rest of the night at my table. Harry stopped by for a moment or two when getting drinks for himself and Padma. He noticed, but didn't mention Padma not being there. I watched as he returned to his date, and watched as he danced with girls who were not Parvati, including Hermione, Cho, and Padma.

Harry actually appeared to have a good time that night, while I sat wondering just when I had fallen in love. Surely it wasn't because of how she was dressed… was it?

Hermione and Krum came by the table at the end of the night and I managed to be civil… However, I do admit to asking for and receiving Viktor's autograph.

The world came back into focus. I was freezing, and bobbing in water. I spit a mouthful of unexplained water from my mouth, gagging a bit.

I had no idea what was going on or how I ended up in the water. One moment I was in the Headmaster's office and he was asking if I was willing to assist Harry with his task/

I said yes, of course, and then I was here. What the hell was going on? Was someone crying?

"Ron!" Harry gasped from beside me. "Ron, are you awake?"

"Harry?" I called thrashing about until I could see him, also bobbing on the surface of the water. Why were I was in freezing in a lake?

"Ron, you've got to swim for yourself, I can't pull both of you anymore!"

I turned to look at Harry and found my friend struggling to keep his head above water, while holding a young crying girl's above water as well. The source of the crying.

"Ok, I'm, ok," I said as I began to try and swim, forcing my legs to work and warm themselves. "What happened? Who is that?"

"Later," Harry gasped. "Cramping up…"

I broadened my stroke until I was in front of my friend. "Hold on to the girl and on to me," I said. "The cold isn't bothering me as much."

Harry's left arm wrapped around my neck and I took his weight on my back. Speeding up my kick I made my way toward the shore and the crowds waiting there. The hard part was keeping the speed of my swimming to a 'normal' level.

The Second Task had the Champions retrieving a 'hostage' from the bottom of the Black Lake. In Scotland. In February.

Yeah, it was insane, but utterly normal for that stupid competition. I was Harry's captive, Cho Chang was Cedric's, Hermione was Krum's and the little girl in Harry's arms was Fleur's.

Fleur and Cedric used Bubblehead charms to basically enclose their heads in bubbles of air to make the attempt, Krum transfigured himself into a shark with human legs, and Harry used a magical Mediterranean plant called 'Gillyweed" which changes a person into a water breather for an hour when ingested.

With that advantage, Harry was the first to find his 'hostage'. Of course, he wasn't sure who he was there for. I mean think about it, he arrived to find his two best friends, the girl he'd been crushing on all year, and a little girl he didn't know, tied to a statue under the water, and if the hint offered by the golden egg he retrieved from the dragon was to be believed, if he didn't retrieve the right one, he or she would die.

So, Harry, being Harry, settled down to wait to see who the others took.

Krum arrived and took Hermione. Cedric arrived not long after and took Cho.

Harry found himself alone with me and the little girl and his hour was running out. Again, Harry being Harry did the only thing he could do. He cut me free and tried to take the girl as well. The Merfolk tried to stop him, but he fought them off and made his way to the surface with the pair of us in tow, racing against the gillyweed wearing off.

As soon as we reached the surface, the little girl, who turned out to be Fleur's little sister Gabrielle and I woke up from the spell that kept us alive under water for more than an hour, I was disoriented, and Gabrielle was terrified into hysterics. Harry exhausted himself trying to calm her while I got myself together.

Together, Harry and I made it to the shore, where we found that Fleur had been prevented from finishing her task by being attacked

by a swarm of underwater predators. That was why Gabrielle had not been rescued.

Fleur all but threw herself at Harry to thank him.

In all honesty, I really think he would have preferred to go back into the water. Harry never liked being thanked for doing the right thing.

The three of us gathered around a small table in the Three Broomsticks nursing our Butterbeers and trying to figure out what the third task could possibly be.

Hermione had stacks of research, lists of all the final tasks for all of the Triwizard Tournaments ever.

"I think," she said with a huff, "that the worst thing about the third task is that it totally cancels out the other two."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"She means that the winner of the third task wins the tournament," Harry sighed before looking up to see the surprise on Hermione's face. "What? The four of us have talked, you know. It's sort of an interest we all share. No matter the score you have coming into the third task, if you are the first to the cup, you win. The only thing that comes from the first two tasks, besides a darn good chance of dying, is the order that you start the third task."

"Cho did the research for Cedric?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah," Harry admitted. "And he told the rest of us. The first task usually involves dealing with a magical animal of some kind, the second is a rescue, and the third is some sort of race."

"Whatever they're doing," I noted, "it's ruining the Quidditch pitch."

"The pitch will be fine, Ron," Hermione said patting my arm. "Hagrid is involved, that means animals of some kind."

"Hagrid is involved?" Harry asked. "That's news to me. What did he

say?"

"He's wised up to us and our interrogation techniques, Harry," I laughed, "he's taken to running off whenever someone tries to talk to him."

"Wonderful," Harry said as he drained his butterbeer and signaled for another round. "If I survive this, I'm never leaving the dorms again."

Three hours of boredom was obliterated when a light flared before the reviewing stand. While we were all blinking the spots away from our eyes, Harry and Cedric suddenly appeared.

Cheers and applause rang out from the crowd as everyone could clearly see the Triwizard Cup laying on the ground between the two Hogwarts Champions.

Hermione grabbed my hand and squeezed hard as Harry struggled to get to his knees, but all I could see was that Cedric still hadn't moved.

Dumbledore and the rest of the judges rushed forward to where the pair, one of them just have had a sound amplifying charm on them, because we could all hear Harry's words.

"He's back!" Harry choked in terror, "Voldemort is back! Cedric is dead!"

That claim had the spectators in near hysterics, and those among the dignitaries weren't much better. The amplifying charm was disabled, and Hermione and I watched from afar as Harry was questioned, then when Dumbledore's attention was drawn away, Mad-eye Moody, our defense against the Dark Arts professor hauled Harry off toward the castle.

I hate to admit it, but I sat there for almost fifteen minutes before I realized what I had missed. In four years at Hogwarts, three different DADA professors had tried to kill Harry three different times. And the latest DADA professor had just taken Harry away.

But, Moody was a legendary Auror.

But, he was also the DADA professor. And Harry was alone with him.

"Hermione," I said, "something is wrong here."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I don't know, but Moody just took Harry away. That's not right, he would want to question him right away before Harry could forget anything. Something is wrong. Find Dumbledore, tell him Moody is acting weird. I'm going to find Harry."

"But Ron," she whispered, "what if you're wrong?"

"Then I'm wrong," I insisted. "What if I'm right?"

A look of indecision crossed Hermione's face before she nodded and headed down the stairs toward the panicking dignitaries. I was in the castle before she took her second step.

Despite having lived in the castle for four years by this point, I'd never really understood just how large the damned thing was. Lacking any other choice, I started in the highest tower and worked my way down.

At that age I still wasn't really fast. I mean, sure I was fast enough that I was only a blur to most people, but I still needed to make my way through all the people who had gotten back to the castle before I did. I'd wasted so much time in the stands… Room after room, so very many rooms. Why did the school have this many rooms anyway?

I finally found Harry.

He was in a locked room with some man I didn't recognize, but he was wearing Moody's clothing and pointing his wand at my friend.

I laid into him with everything I had.

By the time Dumbledore and Snape busted in, the fake Moody was a bloody mess, and Harry told them the story of Barty Crouch Junior and how an orange blur had prevented the man from killing him for the Dark Lord.

So, school was out for the year, and I was home, unsure of what I was going to do with myself.

Oh, Mum made sure I was busy, at least in real time. However, my normal summer activities of hanging out with Barry and Wally were over. Barry was gone. It still hurt, but not as much. And Wally, he didn't work with the Titans anymore, I doubted he'd have time for me.

Mum had me degnoming the garden. Gnomes are little furry potato looking things that infest the land around magical homes. We would degnome the garden by snatching the nasty little buggers up and seeing how far we could throw them.

Harry and I made a game of it when he was visiting, but I wasn't sure if he was going to be allowed to visit this year. Dumbledore had actually taken Hermione and me aside and asked that we not try to communicate with Harry over the summer, that we leave him alone so that he might deal with the death of poor Cedric.

That didn't seem right to me, but it was Dumbledore asking, and he…

That was when I caught sight of something moving out of the corner of my eye…

That couldn't have been Barry. Barry was gone… but then it hit me, Barry was a time traveler, maybe he had…

After checking that no one was watching, I flashed into the woods. As soon as we were out of sight of the house, the Flash was standing in front of me, coming to a stop from a speed I couldn't even track.

Not Barry. Wally. He had his speed back.

His uniform was different, rather than the stretchy fabric that mine was made of, this one was almost metallic, and it seemed to glow with arcs of electricity rippling along his body. The oddness was proven when the mask *flowed* away from Wally's face.

"Hey Ron," my cousin said. "I got my speed back."

Sometimes I think Wally and I were in a competition for a championship grasp of the obvious.

His new outfit was composed of speed force. His uniform was actually composed of material from the barrier to the dimension of speed.

Yeah, I know, crazy.

I didn't know what else to do, so I suited up and we ran. It had been more than a year since we had run together, and we had a lot to talk about.

Wally told of getting his speed back. His problem had been psychological, he was so terrified of taking Barry's place, he had limited himself. It was only when he had to face Professor Zoom pretending to be Barry did he get his full speed back, and more, including the ability to manifest this new uniform.

In exchange, I told Wally about my year, the wins and the losses and how we were supposed to leave Harry alone.

"Wait," Wally interrupted. "Your buddy watched a friend die, and he hasn't gotten any counseling at all?"

"Well, yeah," I admitted.

"Ron, how did you feel when Barry died?"

I thought for a moment before answering. "I wanted to talk to anyone who would understand. But you had your own problems and didn't need mine, Max was busy and the Titans were trying to get over you leaving."

"And you couldn't talk to your friends and family here without giving

away a secret that wasn't yours to reveal," he finished for me. "It seems to me that your friend Harry is in pretty much the same boat, Ron, down to being alone among people he can't break a secret to."

I looked up at my cousin suspiciously. "Since when are you the voice of reason and restraint?"

"The curse of getting old," Wally laughed. "I'm 20 now you know. Here."

From a pocket that formed in is uniform he produced a roll of oddly colored papers and put it in my hand.

"I hit the lottery a while back," Wally explained, "and I wanted to share the wealth a bit. I couldn't get my hands on any of that magical hocus pocus money you wizards use, but these pounds will be better, because you can take your buddy out and party a bit."

"Thanks," I breathed. Normally I'm against being given things, but this was from Wally. I'm closer to him than to any of my siblings.

"And maybe that Hermione girl would like to party as well," Wally said with a grin.

"Sod Off!" I responded reflexively.

"Hey now," Wally said, laughing again. "Spread around a little cash and maybe she'll forget what a clod you are."

He took off at a dead run, with me on his heels with murder in my heart. Like I said, Wally was closer to me than any of my siblings.

He was faster than me, again.

"Hey," I said, leaning on the doorframe of Harry's bedroom.

"Ron?" Harry gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"Well, see, it's a funny thing," I said, crossing my arms across my chest. "Dumbledore took Hermione and me aside before we got on

the express and told us that you needed to be left alone to get over Diggory's death and the return of You Know Who."

"Dumbledore said that?" he asked incredulously. "Then, why are you here? And how did you get in?"

"Back door is unlocked," I lied. Well, I didn't actually lie, it was unlocked then, it hadn't been when I arrived, but moving through a door wasn't really all that hard, and doors open easy from the inside. "As far as coming here, I was working on the garden, you know, perfecting my gnome toss, and it occurred to me, that what the Headmaster was asking me to do, didn't make much sense."

"What are you saying?" Harry asked, his eyes shining in the dim light of his crappy little bedroom.

"Well, basically," I grinned, "and don't repeat this to Hermione, but what I'm saying is 'Fuck Dumbledore.' Come on; let's so see the Muggle sights."

"Ron…"

"Look Harry," I said, "your family is gone, your chores are done, and this crappy little room makes my crappy little room look good, and I find that depressing."

"All I've got is galleons."

"Lucky for you, I'm fairly flush with some Muggle cash," I laughed, "Come on, I'll pay you back for all those butterbeers you paid for."

"Deal," Harry said, offering me the first real smile I'd gotten from him since Cedric had been killed.

After a month of Harry teaching me how to conduct myself in the Muggle world without making too much of an arse of myself, I was standing in front of the door of a house that absolutely had to be as fancy as the place Draco Malfoy was always bragging about.

Harry had assisted me in buying some clothes that would fit in

without being too casual or too fancy. He had even helped me find this house, by using some arcane tome called a 'phone book'.

I resisted the urge to polish my shoes on the back of my trouser legs and reached out to push the glowing disk next to the door.

From beyond the door, I heard several notes of music that I had previously heard from a big clock in London. That was neat.

After a few seconds, the door opened to reveal Hermione Granger.

"Ron?" she asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I caught the Knight's bus," I lied. "I wanted to see you."

"Come in," she said opening the door for me.

The interior of the house was as amazing as the exterior, all the furniture matched; the photos on the wall were static and all in the same type of frame. It was a display of opulence I'd never seen before.

"How did you find me?" Hermione asked as she gestured for me to sit on the large leather sofa.

"Harry helped me," I explained.

"Harry?" she gasped. "Ron, we're not supposed to be talking to Harry. The Headmaster said…"

"Professor Dumbledore is a great man," I interrupted. "But he's only the headmaster of our school. If he said that you needed to stay on your property and not leave the house for the summer, would you listen to him?"

"Well," she said hesitantly, "no."

"Exactly. I've been going out to see Harry, who really needed someone to speak with, by the way. When I found him he was in his bed, staring at the wall. The Headmaster can't say who I will or will not communicate with outside of school, especially, not my best friend."

I think I surprised her with my argument… after all it didn't include Quidditch or food. She just stared at me for several moments. "You're right Ron. I've been a coward."

"No, you haven't," I assured her. "You trust the Headmaster, the same as Harry and I do. We just have to remember, that even though he's a wise man, he's just a man."

"We should go see Harry," she said.

"No, not today," I disagreed. "Harry's spent the last month teaching me to act Muggle. Today I want to take you out for lunch."

"Lunch?"

"Well, yeah," I nodded. "I've shown you parts of the magical world, now you can show me some of the Muggle one."

She took my hand and I decided that ignoring Dumbledore was the best move I had ever made.

Chapter 4

A/N: I do not own Harry Potter. Nor any of the DC Comics Characters mentioned herein. But you knew that.

Speed

From there, everything went to hell.

Well, not between us. The 'trio' was intact and pleased with each other. Harry was happy for Hermione and me, and Hermione and I were having fun learning about the whole dating thing.

Which isn't to say everything was perfect. Hermione would threaten to write 'Viktor' whenever I annoyed her. That tended to bring me up short, mostly because I was never sure if she was serious.

No, it was the rest of the world that had gone insane.

It was the official position of the Ministry of Magic that Harry had lied about the return of Voldemort, and they had an active smear campaign against Harry and the Headmaster, aided and abetted by the Daily Prophet, the largest newspaper in Magical Britain.

Oddly enough, even though my father who worked at the Ministry had stories of havoc caused by a mysterious 'Orange Blur' throughout the Ministry building, no reports of this were ever in the paper.

Yeah, I've been known to hold grudges. Sue me.

Then Dementors attacked Harry's house. He and I were out at a movie (wonderful inventions, movies the one we were watching that day was about living Toys and I don't think I'd ever enjoyed time sitting in a darkened room without Hermione quite so much) when it happened, we returned to find his Aunt and Cousin soulless.

Harry of course, blamed himself. He descended into a deep funk that I'm not sure ever really completely went away.

Harry ended up at the Burrow for the last few weeks of the summer, which was great for my plan to keep an eye on him, but it really cut into my alone time with Hermione, though she understood and started taking the Knights bus out to see us. Hermione coming over amused Harry to no end, actually managed to bring him out of his depression. On the other hand, he seemed to have completely lost the concept of 'get the hell out of here'.

The Ministry installed a 'Senior Under Secretary to the Minister' also known as an arse kisser named Umbridge as the new DADA Professor, and she was a total waste of flesh. More than a little bigoted, and she simply hated Harry, making Snape appear to be kind and supportive by comparison.

She was also somewhat forgetful, somehow losing more than half a dozen wands in the first week, blaming the loss on an 'Orange Blur'

Then she assigned Harry detention. When he got back, he had words carved into the back of his right hand.

'I will not tell lies.' It was done with a blood quill. As the name suggests, that kind of quill uses the writer's blood as ink. They are used for contract work. She made Harry do lines with one.

Yeah, she was a bitch. She somehow, accidently, ended up sealed in her room without her wand. On an unrelated note, did you know that if you apply enough friction to stone, it will flow into the crevasses of a door frame and seal the door into place?

It was three days before anyone went looking for her, and it took most of a day to get her out. She left the castle for good not long after. That was at least one DADA Professor who wasn't going to try to kill Harry… at least not within that job description.

Her replacement was an Auror named Tonks and she was nothing like any Professor we had in class before.

To start with, she was young. I remember her coming to the Burrow once or twice with Charlie the summer after his sixth year. I'm pretty

sure Charlie was trying to get into her robes, and he may even have succeeded.

With the arrival of Auror Tonks, the tone of 5th year changed radically. Instructions came down from the Ministry naming her a 'High Inquisitor' whatever that was, The end result is that she would show up at random classes to evaluate the professors, which mostly seemed to be a classic meeting of favorite teachers by former students, not terribly different than what happened when Professor McGonagall came to visit my parents.

Tonks also supported and indeed ended up sponsoring the 'Defense Association' that Hermione had talked Harry into forming when it became clear that Umbridge wasn't going to teach us anything.

A week before Sixth year began the Death Eaters staged a raid on the Ministry, led by Voldemort himself, one that was witnessed by almost the entire ministry when the Death Eaters ended up waiting for an ambush that didn't happen.

Harry had been seeing visions of the Department of Mysteries for months, they culminated in him waking up in the room we were sharing screaming that Voldemort was torturing Sirius Black.

I've never been the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I could recognize a trap when I see one, and this was a trap. Harry was dressing to try to rescue his Godfather, while I excused myself to visit the loo.

The trip to #12 Grimmauld Place took less than a second, and I found Sirius Black in bed with a pair of witches.

A pair of witches, and they weren't sleeping either. I paused for a moment to genuflect to my hero before returning to the Burrow. Once there I woke my Dad and together we talked Harry into flooing to #12 rather than the Ministry, 'to make sure Sirius was safe'.

Finding his Godfather only in danger of exhaustion and dehydration, (not to mention deliriously pleased with himself), Harry calmed down

and understood that going to the Ministry would have been a bad idea. Dad called for the Headmaster, and Dumbledore mentioned the possibility that they were after a 'Prophecy Sphere' concerning Harry and Voldemort, further suggesting that they wanted Harry to prevent Voldemort from having to appear, because only the people the prophecy was about could touch the sphere.

I excused myself from the meeting to hit the loo… It occurred to me that I had better come up with a better excuse to duck out, or they were going to have me in Madam Pomfrey's tender loving care for bladder problems. Anyway, I went to retrieve the Prophecy Sphere. Actually finding the right one took forever, maybe two seconds, there were so damned many of the stupid things. But, I found it, and got it out of the Ministry, but not before inflicting a bit of damage, spreading the legend of the 'orange blur' to the Death Eaters.

Oh, come on, you're thinking like the typical wizard that Hermione was always complaining about.

No, that's not an unfair comparison.

No, it isn't. Think about it, the magic on the spheres prevented me from *touching* the sphere. It didn't prevent me from touching something that touched the sphere. I used a stick to tip the sphere into a plastic shopping bag.

I found them in the street on the way to the ministry. Come on, don't you guys have *litter* ?

I gave it to Harry the next day, telling him that extraordinary efforts went into retrieving it before Voldemort could find it. I'm pretty sure that he thought that the Twins had gotten it and that I wasn't going to tell him so he could deny knowing anything about it.

I was getting pretty good at the whole Secret Identity thing.

Together, Harry, Hermione and I listened to the Prophecy. It turned out to our Divination Professor made the Prophecy to the Headmaster in 1990. I don't remember the details, but the gist was that the prophecy said that a child born at the end of July, and that this child, who both Dumbledore and Voldemort thought was Harry,

had the power to defeat the Dark Lord.

Which I thought was a good thing, but Hermione really got panicked by the one part I can't forget because of her reaction: " *and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives…"*

Now, that sounded like nonsense to me, I mean both Harry and Voldemort were clearly living, but Hermione insisted that it meant that in order to beat Voldemort, Harry had to die.

At this point, Harry and I had taken Divination for two years, so I knew it was utter tripe, but Harry heard this evaluation from Hermione, so he decided that it must be true.

I almost hit him.

I got Hermione away from Harry as quick as I could, and for a change, I was the one yelling at her for being thoughtless with her words. She really hadn't considered how he might take her words. This was Harry we were talking about. If he thought allowing Voldemort to kill him would defeat the bastard, Harry would present himself before lunch.

And I was right. As soon as Hermione left for the day, Harry sunk back into his dark depression. It took most of the week we had left before school started to cheer him up. Even though he appeared to have gotten over his depression, I made sure to keep an eye on him, so that he didn't sneak off to be a martyr.

That wasn't happening. Not as long as I could run.

Sixth year was marginally better fifth, but only because we were at Hogwarts, and the Ministry wasn't. Out in the world, the Death Eaters were rampaging about, killing people.

I tried to help where I could, but even with my speed I couldn't be everywhere. One side effect of my trying is that stories of the 'Orange Blur' pretty much stopped being told. That struck me as odd until I realized the reason.

I had finally gotten fast enough to be invisible to the human eye.

I'm not trying to claim that Hogwarts was a little slice of heaven. Quite possibly the most horrible thing that had ever happened in the history of the world, happened at Hogwarts. After five long years, I had finally passed my O. W. L. exams and could drop Potions, and never have to have class with Snape again.

And the Bastard was now teaching Defense, a class that couldn't be dropped. At least we knew who was going to try to kill Harry that year.

Oh, quit laughing, you don't know what he was like.

Ignoring the insanity of Defense, Harry had his own issues that year. He insisted that Draco Malfoy was up to something.

Well, of course he was, the pampered daddy's boy was always up to something, but he was so pathetically ineffectual, why worry about him? Between classes, homework, time with Hermione, and my nightly patrols of magical Britain, who had time for a loser like Malfoy?

Then, three days before Christmas, 1997, the Burrow was attacked.

No one died, but it was a close thing. The reasons for our survival broke down to three factors. The Upgrades that Bill had been making for years to the family's wards, Harry's magical strength, and my speed.

The wards were the most effective factor, killing an even three dozen of the bastards before the came within range of the house. He explained that one of the minor Egyptian Wizard Princes used something like Voldemort's dark marks to control his followers in the second century of the old Kingdom, and that the priests of the time had developed wards against them. Through his work at Gringotts, Bill had gotten access to a Dark Mark and tweaked the old wards to recognized them as a threat.

Sometimes I really hated Bill. It was bad enough he had been a Quidditch Star and Head Boy at Hogwarts. Then he moved on to

become the highest ranked and most highly paid Curse Breaker the Goblins employed, but then he came home that Christmas with a fiancé.

Fleur Delacour from the Triwizard Tournament. Quite possibly the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, and one who was madly in love with my older brother.

He considered himself the coolest man alive. Like I said, Bill was so completely hateable.

Only seventeen Death Eaters made it through after Bill's ward additions overloaded. Unfortunately, they were the most dangerous.

Harry was in the middle of the fight, showing just why he was the Dark Lord's primary target. He didn't know many spells, but the power he put into the ones he knew blew through the shields of the Death Eaters he was engaging. He took seven of the attackers out of the fight, maiming five of them beyond the help of any healer.

Mum all but sat on Gin to keep her out of the fight, because in her view Ginny was a child who shouldn't be in the fight. I don't think Ginny ever really forgave her for that. Dad didn't agree with Mum, but the middle of a battle was no place for an argument. He dedicated himself to preventing any of the Death Eaters from coming near the Weasley women.

He did too, though he lost his left leg at the knee to a cutting curse that prevented healing.

The Twins, Percy and Charlie were not at the house that night. Bill and Fleur ended up fighting back to back, between them, four Death Eaters died.

I dealt with the rest, not using any magic at all, but my speed, moving too fast for anyone to see me. I shattered limbs and ribs left and right, leaving five unconscious bodies in my wake. But I missed one.

Fenrir Greyback, the Alpha of Voldemort's werewolves packs was untransformed, since the full moon was two weeks away, but he still

attacked Bill literally tooth and nail, savaging my oldest brother, and escaping in the confusion.

In the aftermath, it was discovered that no one knew what happened when an untransformed were bit someone. Bill was subjected to months of imprisonment, through several full moons to determine that no, he didn't transform…

Though the wounds on his face and chest never really healed, and he developed a taste for raw meat and blood, but he never transformed or lost himself to the beast. Through it all, Fleur stuck by him.

Damn it. He is the coolest man alive.

We all ended up at #12 Grimmauld Place with Sirius Black.

It was obvious to anyone who paid attention that this move was a recipe for disaster. So, of course, the adults all missed it completely.

I mean, who could have seen problems coming when you put my never met a rule she didn't like to enforce Mother into close quarters with the never met a rule he wouldn't break Sirius Black?

The fights started almost immediately.

My mother and I say this as someone who loves her dearly, believes that she is the queen of any house she is in. And that included Sirius' home, unfortunately.

Christmas was hellish, I think especially for Harry. Growing up the way he did, he never really developed much in the way of family coping skills. Seeing the woman he had come to see as a surrogate mother and the man he saw as his favorite uncle fighting was almost more than he could take.

Returning to school was a relief.

Once we were back, Harry picked up on his suspicion of Malfoy from where he left it in December. It turned out that he was right. By watching his map of the school and a bit of following Malfoy around while under his invisibility cloak, Harry finally figured out what the Slytherin git was up to.

He was working to repair a vanishing cabinet.

A vanishing cabinet.

Really? I don't know what a muggle magician would do with one; they come in pairs and need magic to work.

What? No, that would be silly. Vanishing cabinets are paired, you go in one and come out the other. Malfoy was trying to fix the one in Hogwarts so that he could smuggle Death Eaters into the castle, to do Merlin knows what.

"We destroyed it of course. The section I dealt with was nothing more than dust when I was finished.

There was some discussion in the Defense Association about just leaving the Vanishing Cabinet alone to keep Malfoy from trying something else, but we decided to remove the threat we knew about and hope the pathetic daddy's boy couldn't come up with a replacement plan in the six weeks left in the school year.

It was a safe choice. He didn't. 6th year ended with no great reveal, no fights, and for a change, the DADA Professor didn't try to kill Harry and he didn't end up in the Hospital Wing.

Though I still think that Snape was thinking about it the whole year.

We spent the summer, still at #12. Mum and Sirius had made something of a peace between them… or at least they weren't fighting anymore.

Harry and I were restricted to #12, so other than my nightly patrols, fighting the Death Eaters where I found them, we didn't get out much. Hermione visited as often as she could, and we even

managed some alone time… When I could get Harry to take a bloody hint.

Summer crawled to an end and we were on the train to return for our last year. Hermione and I made our Prefect meeting and drew the first patrol. Search as I might, I never found Draco Malfoy on the train that day.

It appeared that his Dark Lord didn't take his failure in good humor. We returned to our compartment after our patrol and found Harry with Neville, Ginny and Luna, the girls were chattering happily away, Nev was deep into a book and Harry was dozing next to the window.

We happily joined in, raiding the Sweets cart when it came along, and playing games to pass the time.

Harry didn't wake up until we were 20 minutes away from Hogsmeade station. He suddenly sat up, gasping for breath.

"He's coming," Harry said when he regained his breath. "Tomorrow, he thinks we'll be too disorganized to offer any defense."

There was a time when I would have scoffed at the idea of Harry having a mental link to the Dark Lord, but I'd seen too much evidence of it over the years.

"Call the DA," I told Hermione. "We need to get ready.

Seventh Year

It was still two minutes to our go time when the Surviving Death Eaters attacked.

Bastards. Ruining a perfectly good schedule with their impatience. Voldemort's hordes rampaged over the outer ward line as his wizards started their work to bring down the more dangerous wards.

The sunlight had kept the vampires from the fight, but there were at least three more giants, a flock of harpies, trolls, untransformed werewolves, Dementors, Banshees, and even Veela.

Harry and Hermione focus on the attack, and I was gone.

I was through the wards and on my way to the actual battle, a push here, and one of the masked idiots falls in front of the spell cast by his mate, I trip another and he falls into the wards, where the castle's magic will deal with him unpleasantly. I snatch wands from hands and keep moving, the wood burns off evenly to the point where it enters my aura.

I managed to trip one of the giants, and the lumbering brute started to fall as I moved on to my next target. Hermione had explained how vulnerable giants were to falling once, something about an 'inverse law' whatever that was. Even Hermione's 'simple' explanations tended to fly way over my head.

I spot Fenrir Greyback, and headed back to the castle to raid Snape's potions classroom. I search for the Greasy Git's personal tools and find his favorite silver stirring rod, then return to the battle before the Alpha of Voldemort's pack of Were's had time to blink. I drove the stirring rod into Greyback's neck.

This was the bastard who hurt my oldest brother, the man who ruined Remus Lupin's life and the lives of so many others. Even untransformed he was a threat… But, not any longer. There was something poetic about ending the monster's life with a treasured tool of another monster.

I was gone and had forgotten about Greyback before he realized that he had been stabbed in the neck with a silver rod. I made two dozen circles of the wardline, dealing with Death Eaters whenever they bunched together, using each against the others. I discovered that Banshees really don't like being punched in the throat when I did it to the first one I came across. So, to be fair, I did it to all the rest as well.

Yeah, I killed some of them, hell, I could have killed them all, but somehow, even in the midst of the battle, I just couldn't do it. The difference in our powers made it seem too much like murder. Murder was their game, not mine.

I came to a stop and scanned for more targets, something was

happening on the edge of the wards near where Harry and Hermione were. I returned to my starting place, vibrating my way into my robes, still hanging in space, just in time to see that Hogwarts' famous wards no longer mattered.

I stared across the field, my mouth open in shock, as Voldemort simply stepped through the wards. Not good, was the single thought that flashed through my mind at that particular moment.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I noticed the wards arcing and spitting flashes of magic in the form of an arch around him, and I took in the silvery-grey mist that seemed to form that arch. The grass at his feet died, shriveling to a dead brown scrub at his passing. A tree too close to his approach, died. That was when I remembered Bill talking about the Death Wards he had encountered in a tomb in Egypt. Bill pronounced them as being horrifically dangerous, but he noted that they had to be anchored to a single spot.

It appeared that Voldemort had somehow figured out how to anchor a death ward to his body.

Bill had described death wards as being insanely dangerous, but easily disrupted… but I could not for the life of me, remember how you went about disrupting them. I turned to our supply pile to see if anything there triggered that memory, though if I told the truth, I could not even remember if Bill had ever actually told me just how one went about disrupting a death ward. Still, there was some consolation in the fact that magic could not pass through a death ward in either direction.

I searched through our supplies, marveling at the variety of different things someone had decided was important enough to bring along. A toilet seat? Who let Fred and George in on the choosing of what to bring? I was so absorbed in what I was doing; I almost missed it when Harry and Hermione both screamed my name.

"RON!" they chorused.

I turned to see what they were shouting about and discovered the green pulse of a Killing Curse inches from my face.

Lacking any other options, I kicked into high gear, and in the words of my cousin Wally, got the hell out of dodge. I hadn't vibrated out of my robes in my haste, and they burned off in the air friction almost immediately as I moved. Pulling my mask over my head, I reflected on how Mum was going to kill me for ruining my robes. The killing curse, having missed me, continued on into the supplies, striking some of the more volatile of George and Fred's donations, and was already starting to flare. The resulting explosion was going to be a big one. That much was obvious.

I was already moving toward Voldemort, and I had learned just how he had managed to throw an AK my way. The evil bastard had figured out a way to open holes in his death ward, just long enough for his outgoing spell to pass. I watched as the hole he had used to try and kill me started to close.

As I ran, the plan came together. I was going to vibrate through his ward, trust my aura to protect me, beat the hell out of Voldemort before he even knew I was there, break his ward anchor, and then position myself so that the explosion will mask my temporary disappearance.

Yeah, even then, I was still stupidly hung up on the whole 'secret identity' thing.

I hit my stride, moving faster than anyone other than Wally could follow, and was at the edge of Voldemort's ward before the flare of his killing curse had even cleared from his vision. It was going to be simple. Vibrate through, inflict grievous bodily harm, and be found where the explosion threw me. Easy.

I hit the Death Ward… and bounced. I landed in some bushes that quite literally exploded when they tried to absorb my speed. I sat quietly for several milliseconds while I tried to figure out what had just happened. Then, I was up and running again, only to have the same thing happen. Across the battlefield that now made up

Hogwarts grounds people were frozen in place while fighting for their lives, and I couldn't break through this stupid ward. My aura, the thing that protected me while I was moving, was an artifact of life, while the Death Ward was an artifact of death. The two simply would not mix. I hit it again and again and again, thousands of impacts before Voldemort had his next heartbeat. And it made only the slightest difference. His Death Ward weakened ever so slightly.

It wasn't fair. For all of my power, for everything I could do, I couldn't stop the bastard. He was going to kill my friends. All because I wasn't fast enough.

I wasn't fast enough, echoed in my mind. I wasn't fast enou…

That's when it hit me. I needed to be faster. I always reached my highest speeds in straight runs. Turning slowed me down. No more turns I decided as I pushed myself ever faster.

"The faster a speedster runs, the further his aura extends from his body," Barry had told me once. I needed to hit the Death Ward hard with all the aura I could get. That meant speed.

I threw myself into the run. One foot in front of the other, faster, faster, faster. The world melted away, and I hit Voldemort's ward hard. I bounced off, pulling the new direction into my stride, moving through every obstacle in my way, buildings, people, even a huge ship off the coast as I once again set foot in Scotland and hit him with everything I had.

It was working. On the thirty fifth impact, I bounced, but not before sinking into the ward as if it were a deflating balloon. Forty three impacts allowed me to push far enough inside the now flexible ward that I could almost reach out and touch Voldemort before being thrown out again. On my seventy fifth strike, I manage to punch him firmly in his non-existent nose before I was thrown out on yet another around the world vector. Voldemort hadn't even noticed yet when I hit him again, this time a glancing blow to the kidneys. Again I hit him in the stomach as I returned again. And again, and again, and again.

The eighty-seventh impact shattered his Death Ward. Now he was

mine.

I won't describe the beating I gave the bastard. Let it suffice to say that it got old after a while, and that there wasn't a healer in the world that would be able to fix all the things I'd done to him.

The explosion that the Killing Curse had set into motion was in full bloom. Hermione was staring at the fireball with tears just starting to flow down her face.

I was going to get so lucky when they found me in the tree.

Harry on the other hand had reacted to my apparent demise in a most Harry-like manner. A look of rage on his face, his wand whipping downward fast enough that I could actually see it start to move.

Perfect. That was my best friend there. I put Voldemort back onto his feet and zipped over to Harry. I curled my right hand around his and pushed his arm down to point at the Dark Dink, and add my will to Harry's and the spell he was thinking cast.

My will added to the spell's speed, giving Voldemort no chance of dodging, even if my beating had left him capable of conscious movement, and the bastard died.

Ok. Time to recover. I needed a change of clothes, and I needed a convenient place to be found, barely hanging on, having miraculously survived the horrific explosion. I had almost decided to head to the dorm for a quick change when I saw it.

A wraith was rising out of Voldemort's body. Just as I'd seen it do first year when he abandoned Quirrell to Harry's burning touch.

He wasn't dead. The bastard was still alive and as long as he was, Harry, Hermione, my family and all of our friends were still in danger.

I had to do something. But what? I hadn't been able to keep him from slipping away first year, what could I do?

Of course, I wasn't the same speedster I had been at 11. I was faster. I was stronger. I was…

Almost unbidden, something Barry said to us came to the front of my mind. "The Speed Force is a dangerous mistress, boys," he said to Wally and me. "As you get faster, you'll have to be careful. We aren't the first Speedsters. There have been many before us. You've both met Jay and Max for examples of those who came before us. When you get fast enough to get to the edge of the Speed Force, it starts to call to you, making you want to enter it. No one who has ever entered the Speed Force has ever come back. It's a one way trip."

You don't come back. That meant that anyone with me wouldn't come back either. I pulled Harry's unmoving body into a hug. "Take care of her," I whispered.

With a thought, I was standing in front of Hermione. I took her face in my hands and as gently as I could, kissed her statue like lips. I pulled away and thought that I might have seen a bit of awareness in her eyes.

Had I imparted a fraction of my speed into Hermione without noticing? Did she know? Would she understand?

I left my friends were they were and was standing over Voldemort's not quite yet cooling corpse. The wraith was almost a quarter inch from the body now. I passed my hand through it, trying to match the frequency of its existence. Everything has a frequency. It was just a matter of matching it.

It took two hundred tried before I got hold of his essence. I curled my hand into a fist, gripping him tight and started to run. My race around the world to defeat the Death Ward had been the fastest I had ever run. Now it was time to move even faster.

There are those who ask questions about how speedsters do the things they do.

A favorite is 'how do you stay in contact with the ground when you surpass 7 miles per second?' which is evidently something Muggles call 'escape velocity'.

Short answer: I have no idea. The 'science' behind what we do was Barry's thing. Me, I just run.

The world tunneled in front of me as I picked up speed, until I was moving through a universe of colors. Voldemort's essence started trying to move in my hand, and I felt a slight tickle in the back of my mind, something that Wally had taught me meant someone was trying to read my mind.

Voldemort was the only one there with me, so, it had to be him. A smile crossed my lips; he had tried to possess Harry once. That hadn't worked for him then, and now he was trying with me? I unleashed the controls on my mind and allowed it to go as fast as it wanted. Since the accident, my mind has always run faster than my body, and even though I was moving faster than almost anyone ever had, that had not changed. Voldemort… Tom Riddle accessed my mind when it was working faster than any he had ever imagined, much less encountered.

The wraith's screams made everything worth it.

Then the screams were drowned out by… something wonderful.

I hadn't yet reached the Speed Force, but it was calling to me. One time when Harry got hurt, Professor Dumbledore's phoenix Fawkes visited the hospital ward and sang to him so as to aid in the healing. I had never heard anything so beautiful. Until that moment. The song the Speed Force sang made phoenix song sound like fingernails on a slate. It was amazing, it was beautiful, and I wanted it, more than I wanted anything.

I just needed to go a little faster. I dug deep and kicked.

It was working. I forgot about Voldemort's wraith squirming in my hand, I forgot about the war, I forgot about all of my friends laying wounded on the grounds of Hogwarts, I forgot about Harry, I even forgot about Hermione. All I wanted, all I needed was to become one with the Speed Force. Each stride brought me closer to that goal and I would…

That's when I noticed I wasn't alone.

Matching my pace stride for stride was a Flash.

Not Barry, not Wally, not even Zoom… He was clad in black. It was the Black Flash. The Speed Force's incarnation of death.

After I got over the surprise at seeing the Black Flash, I found I wasn't really frightened.

Which, if you think about it, is an odd thing to realize when you're facing death.

I guess it was because I'd always known that the trip into the speed force was one way.

I found myself wondering what the protocol for greeting the aspect was. He (It?) was matching my pace exactly, his (it's?) form was perfect, exactly the way Barry tried to teach me to run, but I never really had. His (it's?) eyes were hidden behind it's mask but where the cowl exposed the face from the nose down nothing showed but a macabre skeletal jaw and teeth.

I remember thinking that this was what I suspected a dementor to look like under its robes. But unlike the aura of despair that a dementor offers, all I felt is peace. Peace and a longing for whatever is on the other side of the Speed Force. Barry was on the other side, and had been for years. Who knew what he could teach me now?

The Black Flash never looked at me; he simply altered his stride so that he was running at my side until we were shoulder to shoulder.

"This plane is not intended for one such as you," a voice said, coming from every direction. There was no indication that the Black clad speedster had spoken, but it had to be from him. At some level beyond the longing, I felt disappointment. This wasn't for me? Was it because my connection to the Speed Force wasn't a pure one? Was it because my magic had formed the bond? Why didn't I measure up?

As if he could hear my thoughts the specter of death continued, "No, Tom Riddle, this is not your reward, instead, I think you will discover

an eternity of punishment instead."

Apparently, without effort, Voldemort's wraith was snatched from my hand. Joy flooded my mind. He hadn't been talking to me; it was Voldemort who didn't belong. I was going to reach the Speed Force, and the Black Flash was going to show me the way.

However, he wasn't finished. "And you, Ronald Weasley," the voice continued. "It is not yet your time."

I screamed my fury as the bastard tripped me.

I fell as if in slow motion as the Black Flash and Voldemort's wraith vanished into the colors that surrounded us.

I was utterly alone when I hit the ground, my aura protecting me as I bounced. Again, I impacted on the ground, and bounced. On the third bounce, I started to tumble arse over teakettle along the ground. It hurt, but my aura was protecting me from the worst of it.

That's when I started to hope I was going to survive my adventure. Barry had been right about the pull of the Speed Force. When I had been approaching the barrier, it was all I wanted. I'd actually stopped thinking about Hermione and Harry while I was there; it was only now that I was slowing down again I dared to hope to be back with them.

I was back into what passes for a 'normal' world for a speedster, skipping over an expanse of water, then rolling up a beach, being launched into the air by cresting a hill, a long arc, then hitting the ground, only to continue on.

I was slowing, but I was still moving far too fast for anyone beyond Wally or maybe Max to see. If only I could get my feet under me, I could take control of my forward motion, but that was still beyond me as I hit the ground hard and kept rolling.

I was over water again, then a vast plain, then right through the center of a city, they all flashed by in between blinks. Water, mountains, plains, deserts, swamp.

Was I ever going to stop?

It seemed to go on forever, though I knew that in 'real time' I'd likely left Hermione something less than a second before. That was when I noticed that I was leaving a trail of dust in my path. That meant I was moving slowly enough to actually interact with the ground. Again I was launched into the air, I caught my breath and again tried to get my feet under me. I came down in some kind of scrub country that I didn't recognize, and directly in front of me was…

The biggest hole I'd ever seen.

Shedding speed, but still tumbling out of control, I only caught glimpses of the big hole as I rolled. It was a sort of slash in the ground. I couldn't see down into it, but it had to be at least 10 miles across.

My tumbling finally stopped, but my forward motion did not. I tried to stop by grabbing at the ground as I slid on.

Finally, I had my feet on the ground and I tried to move, when I slid over the side of the hole, the edge of the cliff crumbled in my hands as my forward motion came to a stop, just as gravity took over. My aura vanished and I fell into a long arc into the hole.

Free fall focuses the mind.

Really it does. I found myself falling head down, screaming my head off.

For once, the way my perceptions sped up when I wasn't paying attention was a major advantage. I burned through my panic in less than a tenth of a second, before I managed to fall three full feet. Looking down, I saw the bottom of this hole.

At least a mile below was a tiny blue ribbon. A mile? I was going to fall a mile? My mind veered from the panic to survival.

Distance and time is second nature to a speedster. The mile I had to fall, at normal gravity, would take just over 18 seconds.

That was a long time for me… A long time to contemplate dying anyway. In all honesty, I had no idea how I was going to go about surviving. Lacking any other ideas, I tried to regenerate my aura.

A speedster's aura is tied to his speed. If I could get it to bloom large enough I'd bounce, just like I did when I was skidding to a stop. I started running in place… And discovered it didn't work.

No velocity, no aura. Damn.

Yeah, I know, I'm telling you what happened, so obviously I survived. Allow a bloke to tell his story with a little suspense, eh?

I then decided to simply vibrate myself into intangibility and pass through the ground like I did buildings on a run, while hoping that I could make it back up to the air before I suffocated.

Merlin, but that sounded like a horrible idea. I tabled that as plan C.

I was about a quarter mile from the bottom. I knew I needed my plan A and B in real short order.

Maybe I could flap my arms like wings. Sure, I didn't have any feathers, but if I could slow myself enough.

It actually worked… sort of. Flapping my arms like a lunatic slowed my fall. Not enough, but some. I tried windmilling my arms, and that worked even better. In for a knut, I told myself, in for a galleon, I pointed both my arms downward and spun them in tight circles as fast as I could.

That did the trick. I stopped in midair and hung there on a pair of vortexes coming from my arms. This allowed me to steer toward a small sandbar on the shore of the river. Considering what I was seeing of that River, I certainly didn't want to end up in it if I could avoid it. I'd seen a lot of rivers in my life, but none as nasty as this one looked.

A pair of bright orange rectangular things lay on the sand, along with a small fire and eight people, all of whom seemed to be looking up at me.

Lacking any other options, I landed between the orange things, and wondered what I'd done to my secret identity… not that anyone would know me… I was relatively sure I wasn't in Britain.

"Nice landing," one of the women said with a yank accent, "but you got the colors wrong."

"What?" I asked. I'm not sure what I expected to say, but that wasn't it.

"Your Flash outfit," she explained. She was a girl only a bit older than me, dressed in a pair of denim cutoffs and what I assumed to be her bra. I think it was a bra, the only ones I'd ever seen were Mum's and Ginny's. Ginny's didn't show that much flesh, and Mum's… well I try not to think about them. "It should be red, not orange."

"Oh," I answered. "Sorry, I'm not the Flash. I'm the Whiz."

"The Whiz?" one of the other girls asked, wearing if possible an even skimpier version of the first girl's outfit. The crowd of women giggled at some kind of private joke. Someday, someone was going to have to explain what was so funny about my name.

"Yeah," I nodded, trying very hard not to stare at the partially covered breasts on display by concentrating on my memories of Hermione's face. "I'm from Britain, you see, and I'm kind of lost. Where am I?"

"How can you not recognize the Grand Canyon?" the first girl asked.

"Falling into it is a bit distracting," I confessed while trying to remember where the 'Grand Canyon' was and coming up blank.

Then I remembered Max. Perhaps a more important question than *where* I was would be *when* I was.

"This is going to sound really dumb," I said hesitantly. "What year is it?"

The relief I felt when the first girl said the magic words "1998" was truly amazing. My stomach evidently agreed because it then decided

to rumble loudly. I was ravenous, which was understandable, considering how much energy I had expended in the last few seconds.

"We've stopped for lunch," the second girl said, "would you like a sandwich?"

"Or a beer?" another asked.

In the end, the women fed me a half dozen sandwiches, two bags of crisps (which they called 'chips' I wondered what they called chips) three of their beers and an entire apple pie.

They were, they told me Sorority Sisters ending their summer with some 'white water rafting'. Having no clue as to what a 'Sorority Sister' might be, I just nodded wisely, while trying to figure out why they were 'ending their summer' on the 4th of June.

"So," the girl sitting to my right said, running her hand down my back and cupping my left arse cheek. "Do you do *everything* fast?"

I shot to a standing position and was at standing at the edge of the river before she could blink. "Thanks for lunch, I've got to get home… to my girlfriend!" I shouted, much too loudly.

Sure, laugh. In my entire life, no girl had ever touched me like that. Damn it.

The girls all started laughing at my reaction, or maybe just at me. Either way, I was gone. I found my stride in three paces and ran up the wall of the canyon.

I headed for home. I needed a change of clothes before I got back to Hogwarts.

Except, the Burrow wasn't there. Neither was Ottery St. Catchpole. The whole area was nothing but carefully maintained farmland. This wasn't good.

Once again, my mastery of understatement made itself evident.

So I went to Hogwarts… or at least I *tried* to go to Hogwarts. It wasn't there. Neither was Hogsmeade.

Then I went to London. Grimmauld Place wasn't there. There were houses, but the street itself was called something else, and no #12 either.

I tried Diagon Alley, nothing. The ministry wasn't where it was supposed to be, St Mungos was a vacant lot.

I tried to find Harry's house. Finding Surrey was easy enough, but there was no village of Little Whinging.

I thought about heading to Hermione's home, but decided that it didn't matter.

There were no Weasleys, no Harry Potter, no Hogwarts, no magical world at all that I could find. Even if there was a Hermione Granger here, she wouldn't be my Hermione, she wouldn't know me. I wasn't sure if I could have handled that.

Like Max, my adventure to the edge of the Speed Force hadn't returned me to where I started, but unlike Max, I hadn't traveled through time, I had ended up in an entirely different world.

As the sun went down I found myself in a small playpark sitting on a bench as various mothers and nannys looked at me aghast at my uniform, though some of the kids like it. Of course, they all felt the need to tell me that the color of my uniform was wrong.

That's when it hit me. The magical world might be gone, but there was still a Flash. Wally would know what to do.

I made my way to Blue Valley.

I can't describe the relief I felt when Blue Valley was actually where it was supposed to be. Not sure why, I mean, London was where it was supposed to be, but that was aside the point. I found Uncle Ruddie's home, but no one was there.

I considered my options. Titan's Tower was in New York and the Hall of Justice in Metropolis.

Even if this wasn't my world, and it wasn't, I had a closer relationship with the Titans. The trip to New York took no time at all. No, scratch that. Titan's Tower didn't exist. No Titans here then.

The Hall of Justice was just where it was supposed to be. That was good, but it was empty, even the monitor room was unmanned. But that was where I found out where I needed to go.

Every monitor screen in the room was concentrating on the North Pole, where some sort of construct was throwing off massive amounts of energy.

Energy that was being contained by three speedsters. The Flash, a smaller speedster in white and red, and…

Kid Flash.

I was out the door and heading north before I fully recognized Wally's face behind his old yellow mask.

I arrived at the pole in less time than it takes a normal person to blink.

There was a small crowd of heroes clustered around an aircraft, all watching the three runners as they used their speed to contain whatever the construct was trying to do.

The damned thing just hovered in midair, throwing off bolts of energy that bounce off the auras of the Flash and the kid in red and white. I watched as it hit Wally, and his aura did not deflect the energy at all. He stumbled, but immediately regained his stride and kept running.

Oh, hell no. I was alongside my cousin in a blink. "Get out," I said. "I've got this."

"Who the hell are you?" He asked.

"I've lost just about everything today," I explained, as I hit him, hard, just behind the ear. That coupled with the fall to the ground at the speed he was travelling knocked Wally out. "I'm not losing you too."

I scooped Wally from the ground and hauled him over to the crowd of unfamiliar heroes. I stopped in front of a man clad in an odd bug themed armor. "Sit on him. Keep him away from that thing, I'll take his place."

A masked blonde dove for Wally as if to protect him, while a tall man in black with a blue bird symbol on his chest stepped forward.

"Who are you?"

I blinked. "Dick? Is that you?" I looked back to where Flash and the kid where holding in the energy. "We'll catch up later. I've got to get back."

Before any of them could question me, I back with the other speedsters running laps around whatever it was we were running around.

"Wally's out Barry," I called as I passed the pair. "Time to kick it," I explained on the next pass. "Think you two can keep up?" I asked as I passed them a third time.

The two shared a look and then matched my speed.

"You'll be explaining who you are and how you know me once this is over," Barry said reasonably.

"No problem," I agreed. "What is this thing, and why are we running around it?"

"It's a Reach Weapon," the Kid in red and white said. "I'm Impulse by the way, who are you?"

"Whiz," I said introducing myself and wondering what a 'Reach' might be.

"Never heard of the Whiz," the kid said, reminding me of Colin Creevey more than a little bit. "And I mean never, I thought I knew of

all the heroes of this era, but there wasn't a speedster named Whiz."

"Impulse is a time traveler," Barry explained. "And a little hyper active, even for one of us."

"I can relate," I laughed as a bolt of the machine's energy bounced off my aura. "My link to the Speed Force isn't like yours. My problem isn't getting up to speed, it's slowing down. I'm not from here, that's why you've never heard of me."

"We'll talk about that later," Barry said. "For now, this is a weapon with the potential to destroy the world. Its shields are impervious to physical attack, even our speed. Our only hope is to contain it until it runs out of energy."

"Ah," I said nodding. "Did anyone try magic?"

"None of the League magic users are here," Barry noted.

That made sense. I wondered if my magic worked here, since I'd found no evidence of the magical world. My wand was still strapped to my forearm underneath my uniform. With a thought, it extended to fall into my hand.

"Time to experiment then, I guess," I said. "Confringo!" I cast. "Confringo! Confringo! Confringo! Confringo! Confringo! Confringo! Confringo! Confringo!"

I had timed it so that all nine of the blasting curses hit the machine's shields simultaneously. The result was fairly spectacular. The soft shimmer of the shield flared bright than the sun, before winking out.

Barry shot me a look that clearly said that we were going to talk and I had a whole lot to explain. I shrugged and moved to the device where I pushed my hands against it, and gave it the sum of my stored inertia, just as I had to the oak tree with the giants.

Of course now, I had substantially more inertia stored than I had then. The machine shredded itself spectacularly.

I pushed my perceptions back down to real time, and waited as Barry and Impulse approached me cautiously, followed by a newly

conscious Wally and the rest of the assembled Heroes.

"So," I said to the group, "anyone else hungry?"

The silence of the room stretched into several seconds. Ron looked around the room as he waited. This Watchtower place was very cool. He wondered if he would fit in.

"So, your story is you're my cousin?" Wally asked. Ron noticed that he blonde masked girl was still molded to Wally as if she thought he might disappear.

"Yeah," Ron agreed, before correcting himself. "Well, not here. I looked around your house in Blue Valley and, as far as I can tell, your version of the West family never had any connection to any version of the Prewett family, but back home, yeah. We're third cousins, I think."

"Do you seriously expect us to believe that you are a magic using speedster from an alternate timeline?" the Batman asked. Ron had noticed that the man's questions had gotten progressively more hostile since he let slip that the villains and at least some of the heroes of Ron's home world considered his counterpart to be a head case. From what Ron had seen, this one was as well, and it wasn't as if the detective wouldn't have noticed.

"Well," Ron said as he looked around the room. "Alien, alien, alien," he said pointing at Superman, the Martian Manhunter and his niece. "Water breathing Men from Atlantis," he pointed to Aquaman, and Aqualad, "time traveling speedster from an alternate timeline," as he pointed to Impulse, "an immortal princess from an island of women who wasn't born, but molded from clay, and a lad in alien armor," pointing to Wonder Woman and Blue Beetle in turn. "As weirdly unbelievable things go, I'm pretty normal for this group."

"As I told you, Batman," the Martian intoned. "He believes what he has told us."

"The only thing here weirder than me," Ron snarked, "is the normal

bloke in a bat suit fitting in with this crowd."

The cowled man actually growled. Ron smiled widely and waited for the next question.

"This," Barry said, holding up Ron's orange uniform, "appears to be my work. The ring is one of mine, I matched the numbers with one of the rings I keep in storage. I have no explanation for the pseudo invisibility it exhibits. I retrieved my matching ring and asked Green Lantern to examine them both.

"As far as my power ring is concerned, they are the same ring," the man in green said. "And I mean identical down to the molecular level. The ring's AI really, really, doesn't like that. It's still trying to figure it out and suggested time travel as a possible solution for the duplication."

"And this," the man wearing a golden helmet intoned, "appears to be nothing more than a carved stick from a willow tree with some sort of hair inlaid as a core."

"Hair from a Unicorn's tail," Ron said helpfully.

Wonder Woman looked up, concerned. "Your people took hairs from unicorns?"

"I'm not a wand crafter, I'm not sure where they get their parts or anything, but I think they were harvested from the forests where Unicorns live, hung up on plants and sheddings, I remember Hagrid coming from the forest with bundles of unicorn hair." the wizard explained. "Because, you know, Unicorns are hard to approach unless you're, you know, a young girl."

"Why?" the green Ms. Martian asked.

"Virgins," Wonder Woman supplied. "Unicorns are repelled by the lack of sexual purity."

"What about male virgins?" Nightwing asked.

"There is the occasional young boy who the Unicorn herds will accept," Ron noted. "For a while at least. They told us that boys, by

and large, don't *want* to be virgins, and that's enough to spoil the purity.

"So, the wand itself isn't the source of your power?" the Batman asked, trying to bring the discussion back to an investigation of this young stranger with power.

"Nope, the wand is just a focus," Ron said, shaking his head. "Normally, this isn't something I would tell, well, Muggles, but there doesn't seem to be a 'magical world' as I know it here, so I'm only telling you how *MY* magic works. They covered the exact relationship of a wizard's magic and his wand in some of our theory classes, but I didn't really follow that too closely. That part of the Theory instruction wasn't tested and, really, who cares? Some really powerful wizards can do things without their wands, I've seen Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Voldemort and my friend Harry all do some wandless magic, but for most of us, take away the wand and we're powerless… Magically anyway."

"You've lost your whole world," Artemis noted, "Your best friend, your girlfriend, your family, and yet you're sitting here joking like it was nothing."

Ron sighed, and then continued. "I have it on good authority that I have the emotional depth of a teaspoon. Yes, I've lost my family, my world, my friends and even Hermione. But, I set out to protect them by sacrificing my life to make sure that Voldemort was gone. When it turned out that I accidently survived, I sort of got my mentor back, I got to save my much cooler than me cousin, and I'm in a place where I can openly use both my magic and my speed."

"I'm not sure that would be the healthiest way of dealing with your loss," Black Canary suggested.

"Oh, don't worry, after everything sinks in, I'm sure I'll turn out to be the whiniest, most annoying little bitch around for a while," Ron laughed. "For now, I'm looking forward to a chance to run with the Flash again, and for once in my life, beating Wally in a race before we figure out how to fix his speed problem."

"Do you think I can be fixed?" Wally asked.

"My cousin was the fastest man alive, bar none," Ron answered. "He taught me the inertia transfer attack that destroyed that chrysalis thing. If he could do it, then so can you. He IS you."

"So, you're here, at least for now," Superman said quietly. "Your plans are to be a hero?"

Ron smiled. "If there is ever a chance of my making it back home, I'll likely grab it with both hands. As far as being a hero goes, I was sorted into Gryffindor House. Mindless knee jerk heroics are pretty much what defines us." His smile grew larger. "This may be stealing a line from the Wally of my world, but I don't care. He's not here and I am."

"What are you talking about?" the Batman growled.

"I'm Ron Weasley," Ron said, his smile spreading ever wider, "the fastest Wizard alive."

Ron stood on the observation deck staring down at the Earth.

"Quite a view, huh?"

Ron glanced to his left and nodded to Wally West and Artemis Crock, "Yeah, I mean I'd always known Earth was a planet, but to actually see it…"

"You've got a place on the team, if you want it."

Again Ron nodded, "Kaldur told me the League approved it," he grinned, "they're still not taking me seriously."

"They're taking you very seriously," Wally disagreed. "Part of the reason you're on the team is so that someone can keep an eye on you."

"Well, that's something, I suppose," Ron laughed.

"Tell him, Wally" Artemis hissed.

"Yeah, tell me, Wally."

"Artemis and I have pretty much retired from the whole hero thing," Wally explained, "we're both in college and…"

"Really? You were both in costume?"

"End of the world gets a general dispensation," Artemis pointed out sarcastically.

"Anyway," Wally continued as he looped his arm over Ron's shoulders and lead him away from the observation deck, "since you probably don't have a place to stay, we thought you could use our spare bedroom and my clothes until you get your own stuff."

"Really?" Ron asked.

"Well, after all," Artemis said with a shrug, "You're family… in a weird multidimensional super hero sort of way."

"Ok, cool. How do we get down? The bioship?"

Wally gestured toward a tunnel shaped structure they were standing in front of. "Teleporter, just walk into it."

Ron nodded, and started into the tunnel, then paused. "You know, given that I thought I was going to die, all of this is about the best I could wish for…"

"But?" Artemis asked.

"I just wish I could tell Hermione and Harry that I'm ok," He turned and continued his walk into the tunnel.

"Recognized:" a woman's voice said with an odd metallic tone, "Whiz; B Three Four."

Wally and Artemis laughed, and then followed him into the teleporter, neither noticing Dr. Fate standing in the shadows of the room.

Epilog

The pair stood in silence, well away from the ceremony that was memorializing those who died in the final defeat of the forces of the Dark Lord Voldemort.

It had been ten days.

Ten long days without the touch of her first love. Ten days without a joke from his goofy brother in all but blood.

Ten days.

Harry Potter had his arm around the shaking shoulders of his sobbing friend. His tears came in private. For now, he was there for Hermione, somehow knowing that Ron would want him taking care of her. The pair stood at the edge of the cursed ground where they had last seen their friend.

Despite the best efforts of the Hogwarts staff and the Unspeakables of the Ministry of Magic, nothing would grow here. Nothing could be built here. People who spent too long in the area became sick.

The land blighted by Voldemort's Death Ward had been repaired, but not here. Was it the spell the Dark Lord had used? Or was it the stockpile of magical weapons and tools that detonated when struck by a killing curse? No one knew. That meant that despite the protests of Harry and Hermione, the monument being dedicated today was taking place a full quarter mile away.

The pair knew where it should be, and by all that was magical, it would be someday if they had anything to say about it.

Harry tightened his hold on the sobbing girl pulling her into a full hug, wrapping her tightly in his arms, and stiffened.

The world had gone silent. The silence was broken by an almost musical chime and a golden form appeared in the sky over the blighted spot, brighter than the noon day sun. Harry's wand appeared in his hand, while Hermione used her hand to shield her eyes, blinking through the glare to see a 40 foot ankh that had appeared.

"Calm yourselves," a deep voice ordered. "I offer you no threat Harry Potter. And I will explain what is happening Hermione Granger."

Hermione drew her wand and stepped away from Harry, she watched as a man's form replaced the ankh. A man clad in blue, with a golden cape the same color as the ankh had been. The man's face was hidden behind a golden helm.

"Who are you?" she called out.

"I have many names," the man responded. "The name I am best known by on this plain is Dr. Fate."

"The hero?" Harry asked, starting to relax a bit.

"The aspect of Order," the man disagreed. "My actions are frequently deemed heroic, but Order must be maintained."

"Why are you here?" Hermione asked.

"Two reasons," Fate responded. "The first is due to an emotion I am unused to feeling, which is shame. I was unaware of the actions of the Villain Voldemort. His chaos could potentially have tipped the entire world to that side. I am here to thank you for your actions in defeating him before he would poison the world."

"So, he's really gone for good this time?"

"Yes Harry Potter," the Sorcerer responded. "Your friend Ronald Weasley, dealt with Voldemort, quite finally. The villain left certain… talismans behind, but I have… disposed of them. He will bother you no more."

"Ron?" Hermione asked, wondering why no one was responding to this quite frankly, terrifying display of raw magic. "Ron was killed long before…"

"No one is reacting to us because I have isolated us from time Miss Hermione Granger," Fate responded to the question she hadn't asked. "And you are wrong. That is the second reason for my visit today, Ronald Weasley destroyed the villain Voldemort in a most permanent manner and in doing so, he did not die."

"But we saw…"

"You saw an explosion, Miss Granger, nothing more. The manner that Mr. Weasley defeated the villain is really not something you need to know, just that he did, and he did so to protect the two of you."

"You said that Ron didn't die," Harry pointed out. "Where is he?"

"Ronald Weasley's fight with the villain Voldemort ended with his translation to another world, one very like this one, but different in a few key ways, one of which is that the world he finds himself has no culture of wand using wizards."

"How do you know this?" Hemione demanded

"I am an aspect of Order, and as such exist in every plane of existence, simultaneously. My aspect in the reality Ronald Weasley found himself in over heard his worry about the two of you. I am here to ease your mind in payment for the service he did Order."

"Can he come back?" Hermione asked.

"No," Fate answered. "He cannot. At least not at this time. I am powerful, but not omniscient, there is always the possibility that this may change sometime in the future."

"But it's not likely, is it?" Harry asked.

"No, it is not," Fate admitted. "My spell isolating us from the rest of time is about to end, so I will say goodbye. Ronald Weasley is safe and you need not worry about him."

Again the golden ankh bloomed, blinding them with its glare. When the light faded the man in blue and gold was gone. The sounds of the ceremony returned, as did the other sounds of the world around them.

Hermione rushed to Harry and wrapped herself around him. "He's alive."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "But lost."

"Since when does Ron Weasley being lost bother him in the slightest?" she laughed, tears in her eyes once more. "He's used to it."

"You know," Harry said wistfully. "It's going to bug me forever knowing that Ron was the Power the Dark Lord, and I, knew not."

AN: And so ends my Hero Ron story. Hope you liked it. When I originally plotted out this story, a couple of years ago, I intended for Ron to be telling his story to the Teen Titans of the classic Marv Wolfman era, Nightwing, Starfire, Cyborg, Beastboy, Raven and yes, Kid Flash. But then I fell in love with the Animated Young Justice cartoon (the first season is now on Netflix…), and the series ended with Wally West's heroic death in saving the world. That story seemed a better fit, so this is the result, with Ron telling his story to the Justice League and the Team.

A lot of people have problems with Ron as a central character, and told me so emphatically. Thanks to everyone who stuck it out with me.